



A DOUBLE WEDDING

BY THE AUTHOR OF
ST OLAVE'S





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A DOUBLE WEDDING.

VOL. II.

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E. T. Stephenson

A DOUBLE WEDDING

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,” “ANNETTE,”
ETC. ETC.

“We must not any way
Forget our lady who is gone from us.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

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A DOUBLE WEDDING.

CHAPTER I.

THAT was just how things were when the curate business, with which I began my story, had to be taken in hand.

Seline had been with us little more than a week when that advertisement was sent to the *Guardian*. We were becoming accustomed to her half-saucy, half-audacious, and entirely fascinating ways. I think she was more a favourite with my father than with the rest of us. Perhaps her brightness, buoyancy, and impulsiveness formed

a contrast to our own reserve ; and this contrast, though not desirable for a permanence, formed a pleasant temporary change. Seline came to us with the April showers and sunshine, and she was as changeable, as full of sudden turns and surprises, as themselves.

Then, for another thing, he had not to fetch and carry for her, as we had. Indeed, I think she had almost as much pleasure in waiting upon him as she had in making us women-folk wait upon her. And there was a touch of reverence in her manner towards him which made it very pretty. Only a touch, just enough to soften and tone down the effrontery which towards Anne and myself was allowed to manifest itself in full force. My father was a grave, quiet man, reserved in his manners, not by any means to be called hearty or genial. He could deny himself, and

suffer and endure patiently for those he loved, but he could not be very playful with them—could not make himself what is called popular. And this manner on his part had produced a corresponding gravity in ours towards him. We never overwhelmed him with caresses, never fussed about him, never used superlatives of affection. We understood each other—at least, we thought we did—and we knew that the affection was there, though in its outward manifestation it rarely overran the simplest courtesies of home life.

So, perhaps by way of a change, he enjoyed Seline's pretty little favours and attentions. I think, having been obliged to scold her in that matter of Mr. Barrington, he felt bound to make up for it by extra tenderness afterwards, and this tenderness, this gentleness of manner from one usually reserved, drew out what rever-

ence and gratitude were latent in Seline's character. At any rate, she waited upon him as she waited upon nobody else. Her manner towards him had the most bewitching little edge of shyness, and she was always thinking of trifling attentions, which somehow the rest of us forgot. She would run for his slippers, and be ready with his overcoat, and butter his toast, and prepare him dainty little dishes of salad, and minister to him in a dozen ways which our untutored ignorance never so much as thought of. And she did it all so easily, as if the doing of it were such a pleasure to her. If she had done as much for me, I think I should have worshipped the very ground she trod upon. But she never did.

But we got on very well together. She made fun of us—I mean Anne and myself—called us old-fashioned, dear old geese,

delightful little church mice, and all that sort of thing; used our umbrellas and waterproofs in rainy weather, helped herself to our stamps and writing-paper as a matter of course, had the sunniest seat at the window, and the cosiest corner by the fire, laughed at our awkward attempts to arrange flowers with any sort of elegance in our hair or dress, and in various other ways gave us to understand, but without ever offending us in the least, that she was of a different caste from ourselves,—Dresden china, in fact, for the drawing-room, whilst we were the humble crockery whose part it was to supply the daily needs of the family. Above all, she was astonished at our inability to be excited or even amused at the recital of her flirtations, both on board the *Tussorah* and in the more extended field of operation which was open to her at Lahore. I am afraid

our ignorance must have been very damping to her enthusiasm when she got upon this subject. We could not even remember the names of the people, far less the parts they played, in the drama of which she was the centre. Mr. Barrington had, by dint of ocular demonstration and the orchids, got himself implanted in our memories; and of Mr. Storridge we also had a vague idea, as being 'another one' who might at any time come forward and require interviews in the study. But for the rest, whose name appeared to be legion, Seline's most brilliant powers of description and imitation could not command our interest. We must indeed have seemed to her the essence of stupidity.

My mother never made Seline the subject of conversation with us, except in a necessary and general manner. She was a good judge of character. She knew us,

and she knew our guest, and she knew that we were not of a sort to be injured by a companionship so contrary to the traditions of our bringing up. But I remember the watchful look upon her face during those first days of Seline's stay with us. I remember how she seemed to be noting different points in the girl's character, preparing herself to meet them, and, if necessary, control them.

One thing we speedily found out about our charming little Indian friend, that she was 'gone' upon one point, namely, her fondness for attention from what the behaviour books call members of the opposite sex. She became quite a different creature when one of these entered the sphere of her influence. She even trimmed her feathers and preened and plumed herself, and her eyes brightened and her whole manner took on a new charm when my

father came into the room, quiet, undemonstrative, married as he was; and what might we not expect if this curate, who had been advertised for in the *Guardian*, appeared in the form of an unadopted, unannexed young man? For, even if he were as plain as Socrates, and as poor as Diogenes, and as uninteresting as the carved wooden handle of an umbrella, Seline would set to work upon him, and never rest until he had been brought to her feet in the character of a suitor.

I honestly believe that was all she would care for, at least judging her from the stories she told us of her Indian life. Power and conquest, these were the things Seline loved. There was no vulgar, mercantile scheming about her, no planning for a settlement and a comfortable home. No, I think at that time our Indian lady-bird, as we sometimes called her, was sim-

ply and entirely bent upon enjoyment ; and enjoyment for her meant having proposals of marriage made. When they were once made, she had done with the matter altogether. For the bondage, as she called it, which would accompany the acceptance of any of them she had a fine scorn.

Anne and I used to listen quietly as Seline rattled on to us about her opinions of men and things, and life in general. I think she had almost as much satisfaction in startling us as in flying at Lady Matilda's ideas of propriety. Only there was no spitefulness about it. It was just an honest amusement at our total inexperience of society and its ways. We were as singular a manifestation to her as she was to us. I believe she looked upon our quiet, undemonstrative deportment much as a brilliant-plumed kingfisher may scan the behaviour of a couple of well-brought-up

but entirely uninteresting pullets in whose farmyard it has been compelled to tarry for a season. We were a study to her; she was a puzzle and a wonder to us. And we had advanced thus far in our knowledge of each other, when my father and mother, my sister Anne and myself assembled in the study that afternoon to consider the advertisement for the curate, whom Lady Matilda was determined we should have.

CHAPTER II.

As I said at the beginning of my story, the letter was posted by Seline when she unceremoniously cleared out from the study to avoid the infliction of a call from Lady Matilda, whose carriage wheels were just then crunching upon the high-road.

My father was intending to re-write it, and put in my mother's suggestion that the new curate should be a married man ; but, when we all came back into the study, after Lady Matilda's departure, the letter was gone ; and the matter ended there.

It so fell out that of the twenty or thirty applications which followed, not one was from a married man. Of these twenty or thirty, about six were promising enough to warrant further correspondence. That correspondence reduced the number to two. The names of these two gentlemen were Mr. Berrithorne and Mr. Carlton. So far as my father could judge by their letters, each would have been very suitable. Mr. Berrithorne, perhaps, made a little more of his qualifications; told us how capable he was of organising mission services, getting up concerts and entertainments, and in various other ways working a parish to purpose, while Mr. Carlton was content with simply giving the name of his college, the degree he had taken, the length of time he had worked, and the addresses of the gentlemen to whom reference might be made.

I think for this reason my father inclined to Mr. Carlton, for he always preferred a man who said what he had to say in few words. But, whilst the matter was still undecided, Mr. Carlton wrote to say that he had taken a six months' engagement at the East End of London. This compelled my father to come to an arrangement with Mr. Berrithorne, whose letters and recommendations were, after all, very promising; and the end of it was that he agreed to come to us at once, the engagement lasting for a year, or to be terminated by three months' notice on either side.

Then came the question of suitable accommodation for him. Aunt Sunshine suggested Mrs. Dumble.

Mrs. Dumble, as I have said more than once before, was the woman who kept our poultry, and kept them so well that they brought me in quite a tidy sum for pocket-

money. This made me very unwilling to believe that Lady Matilda's assertions about the church matting were correct. Mrs. Dumble had lived at Burstborough, with a family of position, and she had also lived with us as cook. She was then Mrs. Poslip, a widow. Afterwards she married Jonathan Dumble, the parish clerk and church caretaker, also the hedger on the Hall estate.

I find I have expressed this last sentence awkwardly. A grammatically accurate reader might be justified in assuming that Mrs. Poslip had gone through the ceremony of marriage with two husbands at the same time, one of them being the church clerk, and the other the hedger on the Hall estate. Mrs. Poslip was not a woman to do anything of the kind, even if the law had allowed it. What I mean is, that Jonathan was both parish clerk and

Hall hedger. I do not think I can put it more plainly than that. And he was a very worthy man, though I do not believe that his wife ever came to consider him in the light of a superior being.

‘I always did tell him, Miss Marjorie,’ she would say to me, when I went to look at my poultry or fetch the eggs, ‘I always did tell him, and always shall, that I can do for myself as well as the best of men living can do for me. Only it stands to reason that when you’re past forty you can’t make yourself that comfortable in service as you can out of it. Not but what you may have your health and strength as good as ever, which I’m thankful to say I always had, but if it’s a bit of rest you want after your dinner, and maybe to set your elbows on the table and go to sleep, it isn’t a many mistresses as would be willing for you to take it that way, and suit your

work to your own convenience, as one may say. And so when Mr. Dumble come round, I thought it over and told him I was agreeable, all things considered. And if he was took, Miss Marjorie, I don't know but what I should settle with some one else, rather than go into gentleman's service again. Not but what I'd wait a proper time first, and maybe a situation in between, for I'm not the one to let people have a word against me; but a third husband I think it would be, rather than to settle in a kitchen again, at my time of life.'

All this, or to the same effect, would drop from worthy Mrs. Dumble's lips, as, with her lilac gown duly turned up over a striped petticoat, she walked leisurely round her poultry yard, serving out oatmeal, or rice, or boiled potatoes to the various families of chickens, whose clucking

mothers marshalled them up to the coops. And I remember, on one such occasion, she gave me her views at greater length upon the relations which existed between herself and the excellent clerk of Willoughby church.

‘I don’t go to say that Mr. Dumble’s my equal, Miss Marjorie, no, nor never shall. And he knows it. When we’d been married a bit, I says to him, “Jonathan,” I says, “you’re not a bright man, and won’t be not if you live till your dying day; and therefore it’s a good thing you’ve lighted on a wife as can manage for you.”’

I suggested that the ‘for’ might be missed out, as Jonathan himself seemed to come under the management, and be all the better for it, too.

‘Well, yes,’ and Mrs. Dumble gave a second helping of potatoes to her finest

brood of chickens. 'Manage him I do, and he knows it, and he's content. He brings his wage to me reg'lar of a Saturday, twelve shilling of it, and the church work extra, and I gives him back eighteenpence into his pocket, to get hisself shaved and a bit of bacca and that, and more he don't ask for, Miss Marjorie, and wouldn't get it if he did.'

'Not as he takes it to the public,' continued Mrs. Dumble, with a fine scorn of what other people's husbands were driven to, 'nor ever did from the first, for he'd a fireside of his own as kept him from it. But he *slatters* his money, that's what he does with it, Miss. Maybe it's a cap as he thinks would become me, or it's something to set off little Rose Edith, for I do believe he'd dress that child in gold and silver if he thought she'd be the better of it, his heart is that set

upon her. Or he sees a bit of something to furnish out the front parlour with, or a joint o' fat pork as he can't resist when the butcher puts it cheap, but anyway, he's for spending, is Jonathan; so I let it all come to me first, and then I know where it is.'

I could not but tell Mrs. Dumble she was a wise woman, and, encouraged by that, she went on to give me still further proofs of Jonathan's subjection to her safe and benevolent authority.

'He's a man, is my husband, that's wonderfully easy to do with. He don't argy, as a many would. But I never do anything without his knowing it, and that's the reason why. Bless you, Miss Marjorie, you may be the missus as easy as you like, only you always say "*with* your leave" and "*by* your leave." And if it's big or small, or whatever it is, I

asks him first, "Jonathan, what do *you* think of this?" Maybe it's only about the bit of meat for Sunday, or maybe it's a winter frock for Rose Edith, or maybe it's a weskit as I'm going to buy for himself, but whatever it is, speak to him first I always *does*. And then he says to me, "Harriet Ann," he says, "just as you *please*."'

And Mrs. Dumble emphasised this quotation by the introduction of a comma between each word, which spoke volumes for the good management under which Jonathan had brought himself.

It was the church clerk's wife, then, to whom, by Aunt Sunshine's suggestion, we at once repaired, when the question of rooms for Mr. Berrithorne was under consideration.

We found her standing behind her wash-tub in the little back-kitchen with a plea-

sant odour of soap and soda pervading the premises. But she soon stripped the suds from her arms when she learned what was the purpose of our visit, and she turned down her dress and slipped off her print hood, and with a shake and a pat, here and there, she was as tidy as a full-blown rose.

‘He couldn’t be in a more convenient place, that couldn’t he,’ she said, cheerfully, as she conducted us with a proper housewifely air of pride into her little front parlour, with its flowery carpet and equally flowery paper, and flowery net curtains, and its row of china shepherdesses and pug-dogs upon the mantel-shelf, and its group of paper flowers under a glass shade, Mrs. Dumble’s special pride and glory, on a round table all to itself in the window. ‘I’ve often said to Jonathan that I wouldn’t a bit mind having a lady for a

permanence, but a gentleman I'd a deal rather have, for they don't meddle into things, though they're worse to please with their eating. But law! ma'am, where would you find a gentleman here? And so I never thought it would come to anything. Else I told Jonathan it would be ten shillings that I should ask. Do you think the gentleman would mind that much, ma'am, with waiting and such-like?'

My mother said she did not think Mr. Berrithorne could possibly object, and Mrs. Dumble proceeded to enlarge upon the advantages she could offer.

'It should be my very first endeavour, ma'am, to make him comfortable; and, as for Rose Edith, why, she needn't be a drawback in the least, needn't the child, for she's as quiet as a mouse and as nimble as a cricket, and would save him many a step slipping in and out for errands, and

knows her behaviour, as you can bear her witness, Miss Marjorie, for I'm sure I've heard you say there wasn't a better in the Sunday school.'

'So *that* needn't stand in the way,' continued Mrs. Dumble, when I had cheerfully agreed to Rose Edith's desirability. 'And as to the cooking.'

Here Mrs. Dumble's voice took on an entirely different tone. There might possibly have existed in the mind of a capitious bachelor some stray root of bitterness connected with what the advertisements call an 'encumbrance' in the form of a rosy-cheeked little maiden of eight summers. But the cooking, ah! the cooking, would certainly set everything straight. Our church clerk's wife had not been in superior service for fifteen years without finding out that when you can cook well for a single gentleman, or any other sort

of gentleman, you may be said to have the whip-hand of him as regards everything else.

‘As to the cooking, ma’am, *you* can testify to my knowing what is my duty, and acting up to it. And even before I came to you, ma’am, when I was housekeeper to the Reverend Sparrington of Burstborough, he’d always used to say to me, “Mrs. Poslip,”—for I was Mrs. Poslip then, you remember,—“Mrs. Poslip,” he’d used to say, “I never did see anyone like you for a beefsteak. You beat all them fine London cooks into fits.” Stewed in its own gravy, ma’am, if you remember, same as I used to do it for Mr. Haseltine, only Mr. Haseltine wasn’t a gentleman who set much store by his meals; and a suggeshun of a onion, but not to say taste it, only, as you may say, a feeling that it’s somewhere about, for there’s a many won’t

so much as touch a bit of beefsteak, if you let a onion have more to say in it *than* a suggeshun.'

We had now finished our tour of the front parlour, and were working our way out into the garden. But Mrs. Dumble, who, when she had once begun, found a difficulty in winding up, and who was specially anxious to convince us that Mr. Berrithorne's creature comforts would be safe in her custody, planted herself in the little trellised porch, and setting her hands on her hips, as she was in the habit of doing whenever she intended to go thoroughly into anything, she effectually prevented our exit until she had fully delivered herself.

'And knows how to manage for a single gentleman, ma'am,' she continued, breaking into speech from some train of thought which the beefsteak and onion had sug-

gested, 'better than what a many does, and them naturally particular, as I always say they are. Why, ma'am,'

And here Mrs. Dumble drew herself up until she seemed to fill the whole porch.

'Why, ma'am, I don't hesitate to say I scorn a plain joint, if it's good cooking that's expected of me. Any lodging-house woman with a rough girl to help, can bundle up a ribs of beef, or a mutton leg, and guide it into the oven and back again so as it won't do her no discredit, and when you've had it hot, you've got it to stick to right on to the week's end, cold and hashed, and hashed and cold, while you're that tired of it you'd rather the pigs had it than yourself.'

Mrs. Dumble paused when she had brought the subject to this crisis. Something in her look intimated a desire that

we should ourselves ask what remedy she could suggest for such an undesirable condition of things.

Accordingly we *did* ask, and she continued, with masterly command of the situation,

‘ Well, ma’am, as you ask it, I’ll tell you. Give *me* that leg and you’ll soon see the difference. First there’s your shank end, say three pounds to boil, and caper sauce poured over, or maybe if you’ve an eye to saving, you’d best serve the same separate, because of its turning sour when you’ve set the meat by cold, and then where would you be when it came to using up the bits? Well, there you’ve got him one hot dinner. Then you’ve nothing to do next day but cut him a steak off what’s left, and if he’s that way inclined, fry him a few onions with it, or if he don’t like

onions, let it be some haricot beans, as there isn't anything they go better with than a steak out of the middle of a leg of mutton. Next day I'd mince him up the bits from these two, with a good sup of gravy drawn down from the shank bone, and the haricots fried up and laid round. There's three days for you, hot and comfortable, and half your leg never so much as touched.'

I began to realise, as I had never done before, what a happy man Jonathan Dumble must be, at least if his wife always dwelt upon the mountain top of her genius as regarded managing legs of mutton. I am afraid I did not then realise, in my youthful ignorance, that twelve shillings a week, even with a church clerk's stipend added, would not, when other necessities had been provided, leave much margin for the buying of legs of mutton.

But Mrs. Dumble went on, growing more and more interested as that imaginary joint of hers slowly diminished.

‘Well, then, we’ll start him the fourth day with the fillet, and, if you’ve managed well, there’ll be a good four pounds of it; and that you’ll roast for him, and give him a pot of currant jelly to it, if he don’t say he’d a deal rather have onion sauce. He’d have the onion sauce, if he was *my* way of thinking, but you can’t turn a man, not if you try ever so, when he gets set in his own mind against an onion, so we’ll say it has to be jelly; and then it’s cold for him next day, as it’s a poor tale if he can’t content hisself with cold once a week; and the day after, scrape every bit of meat you can from your bones, and make it into rissoles. You know what I am for a rissole, Mrs. Haseltine; why, though I say it as shouldn’t, there isn’t a woman in all Burstborough to

beat me, when it's a dish of rissoles that's wanted, and knows how to round 'em, or flatten 'em, or let you have 'em in a roll, or smothered with mashed potatoes, or laid in with rice, or——'

'But there is another day yet,' I said; for the wings of imagination began to flag, so rapidly were they urged from possibility to possibility of that interminable leg of mutton.

'So there is, Miss Marjorie, and I should have come to it, if you'd given me time. There's Saturday, supposing you'd started him fresh out of the butcher's shop on Sunday. Well, then, Saturday you'd thicken him a soup, with all that was left, and, maybe, greens in it, as there's nothing they go better with than mutton scrapings; or maybe, if he isn't agreeable to a soup, you can finish up with a nice little hash and fried potatoes round it; and I reckon,

if he's anything like sensible, he won't want you to do no differently to what you have with that leg of mutton. And then, if it's a rabbit—because, when the time comes, there's nothing you can have that's safer and more serviceable than a rabbit, only you know what to do with it for the best——'

But we really could not stay to hear what would happen if it was a rabbit. Mrs. Dumble's hypothetic leg of mutton had already sufficiently convinced us how abundantly Mr. Berrithorne's blessings would be attended to, if he placed himself under her care. And so, promising to hear the rest another time, we came away, just as the worthy clerk's wife had got Bunny into the pot to simmer for a stew.

CHAPTER III.

MR. BERRITHORNE arrived the next Saturday, and, after depositing his luggage at Mrs. Dumble's cottage, came on to spend the evening with us, my father wanting to have a long talk with him about parish matters.

I think we were all of us pleased with what we saw of him. At any rate, he was gentlemanly in manner and appearance. He was not tall, not nearly so tall as my father; but, as Seline expressed it, well-set-up, and he also had a voice which we imagined would roll forth the psalms and

canticles to perfection. For the voice, however, we had been prepared, Mr. Berrithorne having told my father in one of his earlier letters that his gifts in that direction were beyond the common order.

Almost unconsciously to myself, I now judged other people, I mean other men, by Mr. Forrester, and they stood or fell in my estimation as they came up to his standard. So far as I could judge of Mr. Berrithorne in a single evening, he did not come up to Mr. Forrester's standard. But then, as Anne said, when we three girls were discussing the new curate in Seline's dressing-room that night, after we had gone up to bed, one must allow people to be excellent in their own way, not ours. And though as yet Mr. Berrithorne had not manifested anything like burning interest in the condition of the working classes, nor let fall any remarks which indicated a close

acquaintance with the intellectual thought of the time, still, if he took up the brick-fields with energy, and worked away well at the Sunday afternoon service there, it would be more to the purpose.

‘I do not think,’ I remarked, as we sat there in the May moonlight, Seline in the big easy-chair which we had made so comfortable for her, ‘I don’t think he has what one would call a suggestive mind.’

‘What do you mean by a suggestive mind?’ asked Seline. ‘I hope it has no connection with Mrs. Dumble’s “sug-gheshun” of an onion, for in that case one would rather be excused coming into contact with it.’

‘I mean a mind that picks up things out of the common track, and puts them before you so that you can’t help thinking about them. Now, Mr. Berrithorne is very ready and pleasant and all that sort

of thing, but he gives you nothing to think about.'

'He has given *me* something to think about then,' said Seline. 'It is a wonder and a mystery to me how he gets his collars to sit so nicely. They sit very much better than your father's, Marjorie, though I don't doubt your father is the more scholarly man of the two. I always make a point of studying clergymen's collars, for you never see three alike; but of all I have ever seen, Mr. Berrithorne's bear the palm for stiffness and whiteness, and general propriety of effect. I should say the force of collars could no farther go, and a man who could achieve an effect like that could achieve almost anything else if he chose. Anne, what do *you* think about him? You never say anything at all to help us on.'

'No, because I haven't made up my own

mind. I never like to judge anyone in a hurry, and especially anyone who is going to stay. I don't feel anxious about anything else, but that he should be a comfort to father. Marjorie, do you think he really will be useful in the parish.'

Anne said this with such entire earnestness. It was such a contrast to Seline's way of turning everything into nonsense. At the same time there was that in Seline's manner which convinced me she had been criticising Mr. Berrithorne tolerably closely, too, and could have given an estimate of him if she chose, which reached farther than his collars.

'I do think he will be useful,' I replied, by way of setting Anne's mind at rest. 'We have to think of what he can be to the people at the brick-fields, not what he can be to people like ourselves. He is not a man who would influence *me*, but at the

same time he may be a very excellent curate.'

'The self-complacent puss,' said Seline. 'Just listen to her. Will do very well for the rank and file of the parishioners, but intellect must not be expected to take its cue from even the most immaculate of starched collars. Marjorie, your superiority is becoming too prominent.'

Anne took no heed, but went on as gravely and earnestly as ever.

'Well, if he is only a help to father, I shall not care for anything else; and if he does his duty amongst the people. I shall respect anyone who does that, and be thankful to him too, whatever his intellect may be.'

'Oh,' I replied, 'I have no doubt Mr. Berrithorne's intellect is all that it needs to be. He is a very capable man, and has his own opinions, and can hold up for them

too. And he seems to me a man who has a good experience of society. Wherever you set him down, he will soon be quite at home. And by the manner he speaks about parish-work you may be sure he has been accustomed to it. I have no doubt——’

‘Now just be quiet, Marjorie,’ put in Seline. ‘You are talking away and you don’t listen one bit to what I say, and yet I can see as far into a curate as the two of you put together. Now I will tell you. Mr. Berrithorne has a very good set of brains and he knows how to use them, and he will be very good at getting subscriptions, especially from ladies, and wherever he goes he will never be content until he has done something that he can show as his own work : schools, you know, or a lecture-room, or something of that sort. You will see he will get up that mission-room at the

brick-fields that Lady Spectacle Matty is always talking about, though whether he will get very much for it out of *her* I cannot say. And, whether he is suggestive or not, you will see that he has intellect enough to make himself popular with the people. And as for looks, though he has no inches to spare, he is fairly good-looking ; and if he is not distinguished in manner he knows how to make up for it by dressing himself to perfection. Now, neither of you girls need say anything more ; I have set him down for you exactly as he is.'

Which meant, as I thought to myself, that before long another interview would take place in the study, and that after it Mr. Berrithorne would have to pace slowly down our garden-walk, with head not so lowly bent as Mr. Barrington's had been, but as lowly bent as the collar would allow. However, I kept my thoughts to myself.

Next day he was out all the morning with my father, visiting the schools and making calls. Aunt Sunshine came to spend the day with us. We had not seen quite so much of her since Seline's arrival. I don't think she much appreciated our little Indian flirt, though, as a rule, auntie could enjoy fun and nonsense with the best of us. The only sharp speeches I ever heard her make were made to Seline.

In the afternoon we had some tennis. We three girls and my father made up a very respectable game. Anne and I were playing together. We had just finished our first set when Mr. Berrithorne came up the garden-walk.

I felt sure that good tennis-playing would be amongst his other qualifications as a superior curate, so I at once passed over my racquet to him, and by the manner

in which he examined and handled it, I found I was not mistaken. Then I joined my mother and Aunt Sunshine in the summer-house, where they were watching the game.

‘So Seline Consett has taken up her abode with you,’ said auntie.

‘For the present,’ replied my mother. ‘It is uncertain when Major Consett gets his leave, not, at any rate, until this Afghan business is settled, and Seline must have a home somewhere till he does return. She really falls into our old-fashioned ways better than I had expected.’

‘Yes. And she will fall into them better still, now that you have an unmarried curate to make the position more entertaining.’

Aunt Sunshine said this with a touch of bitterness which was quite new to me. So

also was the expression upon her face when I turned to look at her. And then she said no more.

Mr. Berrithorne had taken my place as Anne's partner when I left the game. Now I noticed that they had changed, and he was playing with Seline. I do not know why that was, for Seline had told me herself that she was considered a very good player, and that was why we generally put her with my father, who did not care much for the game. Anne played moderately, and therefore with Mr. Berrithorne, who was good, the chances of success should have been evenly balanced. Now, with Seline and Mr. Berrithorne against them, the opposite side was sure to get the worst of it. But they could manage their own affairs.

Aunt Sunshine remained silent. She

was not even watching the game now. She had turned and was looking away through the open trellis of the summer-house, towards Newcourt, her old home, whose gables rose scarcely half-a-mile away above the elms and beeches of its surrounding pasture land. It made a pretty picture there in the tender May sunshine, but I do not think it was the beauty of the old homestead which had called up that strange light of memory upon her face. Perhaps my mother understood, for she too was silent.

‘Mr. Berrithorne came to see me this morning,’ auntie said at last. ‘What does David think of him?’

‘Well,’ replied my mother, ‘it is early to say much about that, yet. I think, on the whole, he is favourably impressed, but it would be unjust to form an opinion. My

own doubt is how he will settle down in a quiet place like this, after being accustomed to a city parish. One can see at once that he feels quite at home in society. I should think companionship is more to his taste than solitude.'

'Well, then, he will be all right, if only he can be satisfied with the companionship of what is called the inferior sex. And no one should enter the church now who has not reached that extent of self-renunciation.'

Aunt Sunshine really was in a strange mood this afternoon. Still my mother took no notice, only kept to the subject of Mr. Berrithorne and the parish.

'David thinks he has plenty of energy, which is a great advantage. I am anxious to hear him preach. Some of his testimonials were especially eulogistic upon that point. David will be glad if he succeeds in the

pulpit. You know his own sermons are so very quiet.'

'Yes, Phyllis, and a great deal too good for the people who listen to them. I always say David wraps up as much thought in half-a-dozen sentences, as would serve an ordinary preacher for a whole course of sermons. I have a little notebook at home, full of the most beautiful thoughts, which I have written down from memory after hearing David preach. Half the printed books one buys haven't anything like so much in them.'

My mother smiled, as a wife should who hears her husband praised.

'Everyone allows that David is a clever man,' she said. 'I only tell him that he does not give what he has to say with sufficient fire and energy. But if we have a man now who can deliver commonplaces with the eloquence of genius, we ought to

be able to satisfy everyone, Lady Matilda included.'

For my mother, too, could plant a neat little sarcasm sometimes.

CHAPTER IV.

THEN we were silent again. Somehow the talk did not flow freely this afternoon. My mother was always ready to be quiet, but Aunt Sunshine was rarely at a loss for something to say. I do not know when I had found her so much inclined to meditation, and, even when she did talk, there was such an unaccustomed vein of bitterness in her remarks.

I watched the players. Seline was a perfect little picture in her closely-fitting bronze-green dress, with its unfailing accompaniment of yellow, this time a bunch of

cowslips in her belt, and another carelessly fastened into the knot of ribbon round her hat. The exercise had brought glow enough into her complexion to make it absolutely lovely. She flashed and darted, and dipped and skimmed like a swallow over the ground, every movement instinct with grace and lightness. She was a splendid player, too. With all Seline's apparent carelessness, there was precision in the least thing that she did. She knew what she wanted, she aimed straight at it, and she hit it. I found afterwards that this firmness and dexterity extended to far other things than the rapid placing of a flower or the planting of a tennis-ball. What other people attain by long practice, came to her by nature ; command of hand, eye, and purpose.

‘Well, now, I do call that girl a flirt,’ said Aunt Sunshine at last, giving herself

an impatient shake, 'a downright flirt, and nothing more. Did you notice, Phyllis, how she contrived to get Mr. Berrithorne over to her own side?'

'I noticed he had changed sides, certainly, but I thought it was to balance the game more evenly.'

'Balance the game, indeed! It was for nothing of the sort. It was just to get it into her own hands. They have all the skill now. David and Anne haven't a chance against them. But if Mr. Berrithorne had never handled a racquet in his life she would have drawn him over, all the same. It isn't the winning of a set or two, more or less, that the little ladybird is intent upon. Phyllis, *have* you told her to take care what she is about?'

'No. It is better to let things alone for the present. David said something a day or two after she came, and she was in tears

directly. Her feelings are very easily worked upon.'

'I should think they are. But there was no one to practise upon when first she came to you.'

'No one here. It was a young man on board the *Tussorah*. The poor fellow came all the way down here from London to plead his own cause.'

'And went back again, I suppose, like the King of France with his twice ten thousand men. Now, I say a girl who draws a man on to do that sort of thing, ought to be sued in a court of law, just as much as if she had given a promise and broken it. Was he the only one?'

'Not quite, there was one more. But he did not come down. He only wrote.'

'That would be no use. I should say that in Miss Consett's case it would be necessary for candidates to apply in person.

To refuse a proposal by letter must be most uninteresting, compared with the sighs and tears and kneelings which can be produced by a personal interview. Well, that was, how long ago? Not quite a month, and here you have everything in train for a third manifestation. The sooner Major Consett comes home the better, for I think these things are always more satisfactory when a father manages them himself. Now look, she is actually taking him off down the shrubbery walk.'

For the game was over, and my sister Anne was patiently gathering together the scattered balls.

'Down the shrubbery walk, and tripping along beside him, and peeping into his face in that delightfully confidential way which a man can't resist, unless he is a brute. Phyllis, if they were actually engaged, she could not appropriate him with more in-

nocent audacity. And you see he is perfectly open to it. Now, is it inexperience on his part, or does he know what he is about? I think you said he was at home in society, so perhaps it is the behaviour of an expert.'

Here my father and Anne came up.

'We have been beaten,' said my sister.

'Yes,' said my aunt; and she said no more.

It was my mother who asked where Seline and Mr. Berrithorne had gone. My mother was taking things very quietly. I wonder whether it was that she saw farther into them, or not so far.

'She has taken him to see that pretty view of the church from the bridge,' said Anne.

My mother did look just a little surprised now.

‘What, all the way down the village, and with that great bunch of cowslips in her hat?’

‘Oh,’ replied Anne, simply enough, ‘they look very pretty; people will only think it is a fashion from London. Seline said the view was the loveliest she had seen for a long time, and she should like to be the first to show it to Mr. Berrithorne, as he had not noticed it. She told him she always liked to be first in the field.’

A quaint little flicker of humour came into my father’s eyes.

‘I am glad Seline has read Mason on Self-knowledge to such purpose,’ he said. ‘And now will you fetch me my cup of tea, Marjorie?’

I went off to the house, and heard no more just then of Seline and her on-goings. When I came back my mother was alone, for father and Anne had gone across with

Aunt Sunshine to the cottage, she having said she could not stay for tea.

‘Mother,’ I said, ‘I never heard auntie speak so sharply before of anyone. It seemed to come quite strangely. Do you think she is just a little bit hard upon Seline?’

My mother was silent for awhile, looking away to the gables of Newcourt, so red in the sunshine amongst their elm-trees. Then she said,

‘I cannot tell you now, Marjorie, and indeed I do not know if I shall ever tell you at all; but I daresay you will some day understand that Aunt Sunshine has a reason for all she has said. When the time comes for you to know the circumstances of her own life——’

‘Oh! then,’ I interrupted, ‘it is nothing about Seline herself.’

‘Nothing at all, Marjorie. I am glad

you asked me that. It is only Aunt Sunshine's own experience which makes her fear the temptations that Seline sometimes appears likely to fall into.'

There my mother paused. As I said before, she avoided making Seline the subject of conversation more than was necessary.

I asked no more questions. My father and Anne came back for tea, then Mr. Berrithorne and Seline, and we sat talking about the parish for the rest of the afternoon.

It was not until years afterwards that I learned what had brought the sudden bitterness into Aunt Sunshine's voice. And, ah me! I could understand it well enough, then.

CHAPTER V.

I MUST honestly confess that Seline did lay herself open to a fair amount of criticism. But the redeeming feature in her conduct was its utter openness. There was nothing shifty or contriving about her. She was as innocent as a child in her love of men's admiration, and in the straightforward attempts which she made to secure it.

Mr. Berrithorne, on his part, was quite ready to fall down and worship, not the golden image, for poor little Seline was never likely to have much of a fortune,

but the fascinating idol of grace and beauty and brightness which she had set up before him. Before he had been settled down in Mrs. Dumble's rooms a week, it became an accepted arrangement that he should drop in of an afternoon, to play tennis with us, and as often as not, he and Seline had the game to themselves just for the sake of practising serves and back-handers. Because, as Seline said, tennis *was* a game that required a good deal of getting into, and you looked such a fool if you could not take a ball properly. She also discovered that Mr. Berrithorne had a splendid bass voice, and that she, too, could sing nicely enough if she would only take the trouble to practise. And as it was very much pleasanter practising if you had someone to help you, and a bass voice was such a good support and background for a soprano, Mr. Berrithorne found his way

into the house pretty frequently, and duets were hunted out, and occasionally Anne and I were called upon to struggle through the intermediate parts of a glee; and the end of it all was that Mr. Berrithorne proposed—not as yet for Seline's hand, but that he should get up an amateur concert in Willoughby for this new mission-room which he was determined to have built at the brick-fields.

We all thought it would be a very nice thing, and Seline especially took it up with great spirit. It was to be a combination of music and reading. Mr. Berrithorne was really a very good reader, full of action and dramatic effect, and with a telling voice which he knew how to manage to perfection. We had no doubt of getting together a very passable entertainment, with the help of two or three musical friends from Burstborough. When the

thing had once been talked into shape, Mr. Berrithorne became most energetic about it. He showed himself a young man of great push and perseverance. When once he took a thing up, he kept to it almost as steadily as Lady Matilda, only the way of keeping to it was so much pleasanter. For, whereas Lady Matilda invariably made us discouraged, both with ourselves and with our work, by showing us how much more might have been done and ought to have been done, Mr. Berrithorne looked on the bright side of everything, said he had never been in a parish yet where there was so much machinery at work, and working so well, too; assured us that if we would only have this, that, and the other—which with a little expenditure of labour in entertainments, penny-readings, and the like, could soon be realised—there would not be a village in

the county which could take the lead of us.

Anne was much impressed by his determination to get the parish into what he called first-rate working condition. He was a very business-like man, as different as possible from my father, who lived almost entirely upon the meditative side of his nature. Mr. Berrithorne soon discovered that we wanted more 'go.' He said that even in a remote country place one must still live up to the times, and bring a little of the stir and refreshment of city life to the rustics, whose highest ideal of beauty was the golden autumn and the blossoming May. 'We must give them a little wholesome excitement,' he said, 'help them towards the crest of the great wave of human progress, teach them that they, too, have a place and a work in the onward march of the ages.'

This was just what Lady Matilda had kept on saying ever since she came to the Hall, only that Mr. Berrithorne made it much more capable of realization. Lady Matilda said what we must have. Mr. Berrithorne suggested ways and means of getting it. And suggested them, too, in a cheery, hopeful manner which made one feel that the end was already almost accomplished.

Then if some of the leading churches in Burstborough would lend their pulpits for sermons. Mr. Berrithorne said you might raise fifty or sixty pounds by an offertory at a fashionable church, with not a tenth of the trouble which a bazaar or anything of that kind would require. He said he should be most happy to offer his services when his name was a little more known in the neighbourhood. Of course it was no use at present to attempt anything, but possi-

bly in the course of a few weeks or months——

I listened to this suggestion with a curious feeling which I could scarcely put into words. One naturally looks to bazaars, concerts, and penny-readings as justifiable means towards raising money for pious ends. But when money, even for pious ends, is proposed to be raised by means which were originally intended for the saving of souls, that, and nothing else; when the foolishness of preaching is used, not to save them that believe, but to save the trouble of going about for subscriptions, then a kind of commercial element creeps in, which robs the ecclesiastical system of its dignity. At least this was how it appeared to me, when our new curate was suggesting an offertory from St. Aidan's, one of the most fashionable churches in Burstborough, whose vicar he

had chanced to meet when out on a holiday the summer before.

And then that taking for granted that by-and-by he would certainly be so much appreciated that city pulpits would readily be placed at his disposal. That gave me a curious little feeling too. I do not mean that it was not likely enough, for Mr. Berrithorne's first sermon in Willoughby church convinced us all that he had a great amount of 'pulpit talent,' which combined with a fine voice and good features, and a picturesque head of hair, would soon carve a way for him to eminence. Still, of all greatnesses, that which is achieved by preaching should be the most largely tempered with humility. It should be like the glory on the face of Moses, which its possessor 'wist not of.' Now it seemed to me that any glory of this kind which might in due course, say of a few weeks or

months, shine out from the face of Mr. Berrithorne would be abundantly reflected to him from the mirror of his own self-knowledge. He would not be by any means ignorant of it, and indeed why should he be, when the consciousness of it might open the way to sermons and offertories for that new mission-room at the brickfields in which we were all so much interested?

This perhaps struck me more, because, in my father's life, the spiritual so largely prevailed over the temporal. With him, character was everything. Those things only which ministered to the growth of character were of commanding importance. He measured everything by conduct, that conduct which is the outcome of the inner man. What things appeared to be, went for very little with him. He dived down to the 'roots from which they sprang.

Now the scope of Mr. Berrithorne's life, his plans of action, his way of looking at men and things, tended to convince me that his interest was in results, rather than in motives. With him the machinery was more than the power which impelled it, the thing higher than the thought which sent it out. But again I said to myself that I had no right to judge. The world is wide enough, there is room for us all.

Mr. Berrithorne had been dining with us one evening, and we were taking a turn in the garden afterwards, for summer was now nearly upon us, and we spent as much of our time out of doors as we could. Seline, with the prettiest grace imaginable, generally appropriated the curate, carried him off for half-an-hour's practice at 'serving,' or beguiled him into a sequestered walk, and got him to tell her stories about his college pranks. But on this particular

evening, by some chance or other, the charm had not been brought to bear upon him, and therefore all the three of us, Anne, Seline, and myself, were basking, according to our various capacities, in the sunshine of his presence.

The conversation turned, as it often did now, to the concert which we intended to give in about a month's time. We had got it all planned out very successfully, and the advertisements were soon to be issued.

Seline struck out a bright idea. Why not have it an out-door gathering on the rectory lawn, with a tent in readiness in case the weather should be wet? With sunshine, it would be perfectly delightful; and, if rain came, we should still, under the tent, be no worse off than in the school-room, where it was originally planned to take place.

We all approved of Seline's suggestion. An open-air concert would be quite a novelty in the annals of Willoughby dissipation. And, if it was anything like successful, we might try it again afterwards upon a larger scale, and scatter advertisements freely in Burstborough.

'I must say the presence of numbers always inspires me,' said Mr. Berrithorne; 'I can preach with much more effect before a large audience.'

'So can I,' said Seline, 'at least I mean numbers inspire me, too. When we acted charades on board, I could always do it ten times better if the captain let the crew come on the quarter-deck. I often feel as if I should like to sing in a real big concert-room. Of course for a charity. Or to do tableaux.'

And Seline sprang up in an ecstasy.

'Tableaux, Marjorie! Let us do some

tableaux. Did you ever act in a tableau?’

‘No,’ said I, ‘but I have stood still in one, which means the same thing, I suppose.’

Seline slapped my face with a great bunch of lilac which she had gathered, and then kissed me.

‘No, it doesn’t mean the same thing at all, at all. It means that you are a carping, criticising old Marjorie, and that you want both your ears boxing. That is just what it means. Now tell me what was this wonderful tableau that you stood still in, if one must be absolutely correct. And where was it, and why was it, for no one would ever think *you* were up to such frivolities. It was for a charity, of course.’

‘Of course,’ I replied. ‘Old Miss Rake-ridge was having a series of them, up at the Hall, about two years ago, before Lady

Matilda was thought of. It was to raise funds for a cottage hospital somewhere. The one we did was "Red Riding-Hood." Anne was the grandmother, and I was the wolf, and Rose Edith was Red Riding-Hood. You know Rose Edith, Mr. Berri-thorne? She is Mrs. Dumble's little girl, and Anne's godchild.'

'Another godchild!' And Seline gave that comical shrug of her shoulders to which we were now so well accustomed. 'Anne, I do believe you are sponsor to the whole village. You must have given away as many prayer-books as would set up a stationer's shop, and, when it comes to putting them through their catechism and all that sort of thing, you will never have a minute that you can call your own. I have counted up eight already. How many more there may be, I do not know. *Are there many more, Anne?*'

Anne replied, with her usual calm gravity,

‘I have nine. I am always willing to stand for a child, for so often you cannot get the parents to see their duty in a proper light. The least difficulty in finding god-parents often makes them neglect their children’s baptism altogether. It is very sad to see how careless they are.’

‘We must have that remedied,’ said Seline, promptly. ‘Mr. Berrithorne, see to it that the mission-room is put up without further delay, or Anne will have such a weight of catechism and responsibility upon her that she will sink under it. Fancy having the beliefs of nine children to attend to! I had much rather see that their hats were properly trimmed, for that is a matter one can look to the end of. But

beliefs ! I have never found out yet what I believe myself.'

'You were never asked to be a god-mother, I daresay,' remarked Mr. Berri-thorne, with an admiring look into the saucy bright eyes dancing so mischievously under their pent-house of dark curls. Mr. Berrithorne had succumbed to Seline from the very first. We were only waiting now for him to have an interview in the study—and be refused.

'Oh, dear, no, nothing of the sort. I should not in the least know what to do with the baby when it came to giving it into the clergyman's hands. But I do say, Anne, that if ever anyone was called upon to come bravely to the front in a case of godmotherly need, it is yourself. You have so much to be thankful for on your own account.'

Mr. Berrithorne looked enquiringly, so did Anne and I. We did not in the least know what Seline was driving at.

‘Well, I mean,’ she said, ‘that that grand old aunt of yours came out so splendidly. Just fancy, Mr. Berrithorne, Anne’s godmother died and left her I don’t know how many thousands of pounds, all for her very own, to do just as she liked with. Only think of it, thousands of big, round, golden sovereigns, to be her own when she arrived at the age of—what was it, Anne? and have you arrived at it yet?’

‘Seline,’ said Anne, turning as scarlet as a peony, ‘I do wish you wouldn’t talk about it. And it isn’t that sort of thing, at all.’

‘Isn’t it? But I believe, and I am quite sure, that it *is* that sort of thing, for papa

told me himself, and he must have known all about it. I do think it is a shame nobody did as much for you, Marjorie. Only think of your having nothing but the poultry to make up for it. The ways of providence are very unequal.'

'Seline!' I said, in accents of subdued indignation. How we did wish the little parrot would hold her tongue. 'Seline, how *can* you?'

But Seline just tossed back her mop of tangled curls, and peeped round in front of Mr. Berrithorne to see if I was really vexed.

'How can I? Why, I don't see any harm in it. I am sure, if my old god-mother had done as much for me, all the world should have been welcome to know. But I won't say another word, dear old Marjorie, if you don't like it. I think

neither of my godmothers went beyond a prayer-book with a cross on the back, and any quantity of good advice.'

'Which does not seem to have done you much good,' suggested Mr. Berrithorne, who had been silent whilst this legacy business was under discussion.

'Exactly. That is the very thing it never did do. But how clever of you, Mr. Berrithorne, to have found it out. I am sure I always try to do both the dear old ladies as much credit as possible. They did say, though, that my temper improved as I grew older.'

'Perhaps that was because they let you alone,' I remarked, remembering what a good remedy the being let alone had been in my own case.

'Very likely. But we are forgetting all about the concert, and having it out of

doors. I vote for having it out of doors. Mr. Berrithorne, will you come over to the lawn with me and see how much room we can make ?'

And Mr. Berrithorne went; a little less eagerly, I fancied, than was his wont when Selina invited him to anything.

CHAPTER VI.

THINGS went on quietly as usual for a few days. This concert was much talked about, also plans for the new mission-room at the brick-fields. I think Mr. Berri-thorne must have found that Anne's opinions were more reliable than those of Seline, for he seemed anxious to discuss matters with her, rather than with our little ladybird, who apparently looked at the whole thing as just a convenience for giving fun and excitement. Now my sister Anne took everything seriously, even tableaux and outdoor concerts. She

looked at them as means to an end, and that end was the building of the mission-room. And the services at the mission-room were to raise the brick-yard labourers into something like decency of life, and help them to make their future manly and honourable. This, and not any display which we could make of ourselves or our abilities upon the rectory lawn, was in Anne's mind when she entered so earnestly into the arrangements for that concert. And I suppose it was Mr. Berrithorne's perception of this which made him turn to her now so much more frequently for help than to Seline.

Seline had been with us about six weeks. We all liked her in spite of her wilful ways, which had a touch of selfishness about them. If she did get a great deal out of us in fetching and carrying for her, and mending gloves and stockings

and setting on her buttons and all that sort of thing, she repaid us in bright smiles and pretty winning speeches. And then, as I said before, she was above-board in everything. There were no concealments about her.

She was like one of those gay-coloured reflecting balls one sees hung from the ceiling of a drawing-room. All its beauty is on the outside, but at the same time there is nothing disagreeable inside, if you *do* happen to break it open, nothing but the disappointment of finding that it is empty.

Then there was the ever present feeling, heightened by her own apparent utter unconsciousness of it, that at any time the tidings of her father's death might fall upon us.

We still kept the papers from her until one of ourselves had seen them. Not that

to do so required much vigilance on our part, for she never appeared to be on the look-out for news, either evil or good.

‘Anything fresh turned up at the front?’ she would ask sometimes, as she saw my father’s grey head bending over the ‘special news from our war correspondent.’ But as soon as the question was answered, she seemed anxious to be away to her tennis-playing or glee practising. And well it was she could take things so lightly. Life would have been a weariness else.

But one day the long dreaded blow did fall.

We four women folk were gathered in the dining-room. I was sorting over my eggs at the cupboard. Anne was knitting a hood for one of her numerous brood of god-children. We were to have a little dinner-party that evening, and Seline, who always attended to the table decorations,

had got together the available vases, and was making them gay with June flowers. Whilst she was busy with a cluster of yellow poppy, which was to be arranged with dark brown beet leaves, my father came into the room. He fidgetted about for a minute or two, and then, remarking in a vague sort of way that he must go down into the village to see some sick people, he went away, making a long circuit as he did so, to reach the table where my mother was seated with her work.

He made some slight remark to her, and afterwards, laying his hand upon her shoulder for a second or two, passed on.

We understood. My mother made no immediate reply, but after Anne and I, who both noticed what my father did, had chattered through an unmeaning remark or two, she went quietly out of the room.

I felt sure, by my father's manner, and

the look of loving pity which he cast upon unconscious Seline amongst her flowers, what it was. Major Consett was either wounded or killed.

My heart began to beat rapidly. I could scarcely keep the tears out of my eyes. Anne's fingers trembled over the little hood she was knitting. But we both of us felt we must make no sign, nor even go out of the room, or Seline would suspect that something had happened.

The minutes seemed to me like hours, with that dead weight of suspense hanging over me. Seline went on arranging her flowers, now and then making a dash for the mirror, to try how one or another would suit her complexion.

'Girls,' she said at last, 'I mean to make a particularly effective toilette to-night.'

Mr. Berrithorne was coming, of course.

‘It is to be the primrose muslin that I bought in London. You admired it so much, Marjorie, you remember, and there has never yet been an occasion special enough to produce it. What are *you* going to put on?’

I had to choke down a great sob before I could reply in anything like a commonplace tone.

‘I haven’t really begun to think about it, yet.’

‘Ah!’ and Seline stroked the petals of a white narcissus, and kissed them. ‘That is just the way with you. You never do begin to think about what you shall put on, until the very last, and then you rush at it in a hurry, and you have no time to think or to consider details, and the consequence is that you come into the drawing-room like a dowdy. You would have a very nice style, Marjorie, if you

would only take proper pains. You have no striking points, but the general effect is decidedly ladylike. As for Anne, she is calmness and dignity combined at the early age of twenty what is it? and only wants marrying to go straight into a trained black velvet. If I were you, Anne, I should marry on purpose to be able to wear black velvet. It would suit you so admirably; but of course until you are thirty or a wife, it is out of the question. What is it to be to-night for you, Anne?’

‘Oh! *anything*,’ said my sister, going down on her knees behind the tablecloth to look for an imaginary pin. ‘Perhaps I may arrange a bow or two upon my striped grenadine.’

‘Then I should advise you to set about it at once. That is the title of a book I once read—“Set about it at once.” And you should follow the advice whenever you

have anything to do with millinery. It takes you as long to stitch on a bow, as if you had to lay a foundation for it and fix it down with mortar, and the effect is as solid, too. That is an additional motive for your being speedily married, because then you can adopt a weighty style and no one will say anything. Anne, would you like me to be really good to-night, and put the bows on for you?’

‘No, thank you,’ said Anne, still in a stifled voice from behind the table-cloth. ‘If I want them, I will put them on myself.’

For we knew well enough there would be no dinner-party for us, that night.

‘Very well. Only if you find you want a hammer and nails, tell me and I will fetch them. I like to see a thing look solid. Anne, you really did look nice last Wednesday, when I did up your hair for

you, and draped your navy-blue muslin at the back. I am sure Mr. Berrithorne was struck, for his manner towards you was quite different, and has been ever since.'

Seline paused, darted a glance across towards Anne. But Anne was still behind the table-cloth. Seline could put a strange sharpness into her eyes, sometimes. It reminded me of a cat's look when another cat is coming to its saucer of milk.

'It shows what dress can do,' she continued. 'Mr. Berrithorne told me that night, he thought your taste in dress was superior. I told him it was nothing of the sort, and that I had done your hair for you myself, and draped your skirt. I don't like people to be praised for what isn't their own. All the same, I would make you look just as nice again to-night, if you would let me. Only I should tell him I had done it. You know I can say anything to him, now.'

I remarked that I thought she had done that from the beginning.

‘No, not quite. I never encourage people, just at first. But he must not carry his admiration of you too far, Anne. He has almost neglected me once or twice lately, since I began to do your hair for you, and it stands to reason I cannot allow that. Then he carries you off to talk to you about the parish, just as if we other girls had no sense. Anne, I think, after all, I shall let you dress yourself to-night. Then you will see what you will see.’

‘Oh, Seline!’ I said, ‘do get on with your flowers.’

‘I am getting on with them. I have put some in all the vases, and now I am only exercised about what will go best with primrose muslin. If I had but kept Mr. Barrington on a few weeks longer, he would have served the present necessity admirably, for I could have intimated to

him that a scarlet cactus would be acceptable. There is nothing scarlet in the garden.'

'Nothing scarlet!' I exclaimed, startled for a moment into forgetfulness of what lay behind all this miserable frivolity. 'Nothing scarlet? Why, there are whole beds of geraniums out in the garden, just in the very freshness of their bloom.'

Seline flung a poppy into my face, and dusted me all over with its powdery pollen.

'Marjory, what a Goth you are! to mention the colour of any sort of geranium in connection with the primrose of my muslin. Does not your artistic faculty tell you that only one shade, that of the scarlet red cactus, entirely harmonizes with that pale, pale yellow. If I cannot have that sort of scarlet, I will have none at all.'

'Then I am afraid you will have none at all,' I replied, with more meaning in my words than poor Seline knew. And down

I went on my knees to help Anne to look for that pin. My own tears were coming, and I felt a hard lump in my throat. The child was so gay, so unconcerned. That she should look charming in her primrose muslin was all she thought about, whilst we knew what a terrible shock was waiting for her. It did seem such a miserable piece of acting that we were all three engaged in.

She made a second dash at the mirror, this time with a handful of yellow poppies and some brown ivy leaves.

‘That will do,’ she said. ‘This yellow shades well with primrose, and the brown leaves bring out the colour. It is almost as good as scarlet. Oh! you girls, don’t you wish you could wear bright colours like these? It would save you a world of trouble in suiting yourselves. For anyone who can carry off browns and golds, the

most difficult problem of life is already solved. Now I shall go and try my dress on, but I am sure I cannot be mistaken.'

And away she danced, singing up the stairs to her little room over the porch. Then Anne and I went to seek our father and mother.

We found them in the study. They both looked very grave. I think my father's face had the most pain upon it. And there was the paper. And there was Major Consett's name amongst the killed.

'How are we to break it to her?' said my mother. 'You are quite sure, David, it is really so.'

'Quite sure. I went over to the post-office and telegraphed to the War Department, and received a reply, before I said anything to you about it. There can be no doubt. And the sooner she knows the better.'

‘Anne,’ said my mother, ‘will you go at once and write notes to the people who were to have come to-night. And, Marjorie, I think Seline had better come in here. Your father and I will see her alone. Do you think that will be best, David?’

‘Poor child!’ said my father, and there was infinite pity in his voice. ‘Yes, that will be the best. Tell her to come to us, Marjorie.’

I went trembling to the door of the little room. Seline was humming the soprano part of a duet which she was to sing with Mr. Berrithorne at the concert. There was the primrose muslin dress flung upon the bed, and there were the long trails of brown ivy ready to drape its soft, cloudy folds.

‘Seline,’ I said, ‘will you go to father in the study?’

She gathered up a handful of muslin and fastened it in its place with the ivy.

‘Just now?’ she said; ‘oh, what a bother! and I wanted to get the effect of this puff at the back. The clusters of yellow will look perfectly lovely. I am so glad I thought of poppies. Your father is not wanting to scold me, is he, Marjorie? I’m sure I don’t know that I have been doing anything lately. Or has Mr. Berri-thorne——’

‘No, no, Seline, it isn’t a scolding. But do come as soon as you can. Never mind the poppies.’

And back I flew, lest, turning, she should see my red eyes, and away down into the garden, where I wandered about for a long time, feeling more dreary and miserable than I could tell.

When I came back, my mother said Seline had gone into her own room.

She was there now. My mother thought we had better leave her there a little while alone, until the violence of her grief had spent itself.

‘She was perfectly still for a few seconds after we had broken the news to her as gently as we could. Then she burst into a passionate fit of crying, and I led her upstairs into her own room. I bathed her face and smoothed her hair, and she had begun to be calmer before I came away. Perhaps she will lie still awhile. If she can sleep, it will be better for her, after this terrible shock.’

I wandered out again into the garden. Poor little Seline. I felt so grieved to think that I had ever been impatient with her, even in my thoughts. Now she should be as a sister to us both. We would comfort and cherish her always. All that love of ours could do, should

be done to fill up this great blank which death had made. Fatherless, motherless, alone now in the great wide world, we would take her into our hearts, and cover, with tenderest sympathy and flowers of loving-kindness, the sorrow which she must carry with her even to the end.

Coming back, I asked my father if I might venture to go up into the little room.

‘I think you may,’ he said. ‘Perhaps it will be better.’

‘And,’ my mother added, ‘if Seline does not seem able to rest, stay with her. It may, perhaps, be a relief to her to speak about what has happened. But if she can sleep and forget for a little while, it will be so much more restful for her.’

I stole quietly upstairs. The door was just open, so that I could go in without at

all disturbing her, if she chanced to be asleep.

The big easy-chair was in front of the window, its back to where I stood. Seline was curled up, after her fashion, on the seat of it. She had a way of what she called perching, with her little feet doubled up under her, and she was so tiny and the chair so big that she was almost lost in it. The hand that I could see was clenched amongst her thick, black curls. Her head was bent down very low. There were no sobs now. She might have been asleep, but that in the mirror opposite I saw her face reflected, with the brown eyes showing, tear-dimmed, under the silken lashes.

I went up to her. I was going to put my arms round her neck. I was going to press my lips to hers, and clasp her, orphaned as she was now, to my heart, and tell her how dearly we all cared for her in

her grief, how we would all help her to bear it, how she should stay with us always now, and be to us as our own.

But when I had come a little nearer, and was bending over her to touch the soft rosy lips, I paused, turned and came away again, as quietly as I had entered.

There was an outspread pamphlet upon the arm of the chair. Seline was studying it. It was Messrs. Jay and Son's latest illustrated catalogue of fashions in the Mourning Department.

CHAPTER VII.

I SAID nothing about it to anyone. Seline never knew with what excellent sisterly intentions I had gone up into her room that afternoon, never knew how much I had wished to be to her and do for her. And I never hinted to anyone in what manner I had found her employed. But it set a distance between us which was never again overpassed.

I must say, however, that she studied Messrs. Jay's catalogue to some purpose. I never beheld any mourning so stylish, so faultless in its fit, so entirely accurate

in its depth of crape and judiciously-graduated application of ornament, as that which was sent down from Regent Street, 'at the shortest possible notice.' Sorrow may or may not be a fine art in itself, but it is certainly a cause of fine art in others.

Of course Seline did not show to advantage in her mourning. Girls of that distinctively brunette complexion never look their best in black cashmere and crape, though the highest attainable skill has fitted the one and draped the other. Seline herself knew that well enough, and, before she had worn it a week, she came down one evening with a great handful of red geranium in the crape bow which the dressmaker had disposed with such artistic effect upon the left shoulder. Mr. Berri-thorne was coming in to dinner that evening, very quietly of course. It was the

first time he and Seline had met since the tidings of her bereavement.

‘Do you think it is *quite* the thing?’ I said, touching the beautiful, velvety petals which seemed to take a fresh brilliance from the deadness of their surroundings. We Willoughby people had rather strict notions about mourning, and for such a very near relative, too.

Seline gave herself a little impatient fling.

‘I don’t care whether it is quite the thing or not,’ she replied, ‘I only know that I am not going to make myself a fright for the sake of being in the fashion. People may say what they like, and I shall do what I like. Besides, you are quite at liberty to wear red, even with crape. I asked the dressmaker who came down to fit me, for I did not want to do anything in bad taste, and she told me it was quite

the correct thing. Poor papa always said it was a folly to be led by other people's opinions.'

Seline made these remarks with what might be called an air of dignity. That was the effect which her affliction had had upon her. It had given her, apparently, a consciousness of being set apart as an object of attention. From the first that had had a distinct effect in mitigating the bitterness of her loss. I believe it sustained her, as one sometimes sees the chief mourner at a village funeral sustained by the feeling of walking first in the procession, and being, after the body itself, the central object of curiosity. I said no more about the red geraniums.

Sooner than I could have thought possible, things fell back into their old way. Seline would take up the papers—there was no need for vigilance now—and read

the war news, and look down the list of the killed and wounded, and sometimes find the name of one or another with whom she had danced and flirted at Lahore.

‘Poor fellow!’ she would say, ‘he used to be very attentive. There will be another promotion now.’

She was wonderfully practical in what she had to do, relative to pension and arrears of pay. I never thought she had so much business faculty. It really seemed as if the clearness of vision and precision of aim which guided her so unerringly in loops, ribbons, and colours, had penetrated to her mental being, and enabled her to decide how it would be best to choose, arrange and provide for the future. In other ways, too, a great change in her character manifested itself. She was never again so wild and impulsive as

at first. She quite laid aside that innocent sauciness which could say such daring things, yet never offend in the saying of them. It seemed to me that, with the putting on of her crape and cashmere, she became years older. A curious little crust of worldliness might have been sent down in the box with the rest of the things, and charged for in the bill, and it fitted her as faultlessly as the dress, and by-and-by became as much a part of herself. There was, if I may so say, in all her conduct now, a noticeable absence of spontaneousness, a consideration of ways and means, which made her seem to us at times almost like another person.

There was no more question of her remaining permanently with us. That was now taken for granted. She had no near relations in England, and no friends more intimate than ourselves. In India there

was no one upon whom she had any claim. Mrs. Macallister, the lady who had brought her home, and with whom she still kept up an occasional correspondence, was going out again in the autumn to join her husband, and Seline sometimes talked of accompanying her, and staying for a year or two in India, visiting about amongst her friends. Neither my father nor my mother encouraged her in this. They said she was better with us, and that as long as she needed a home at all, there would be one for her at Willoughby.

‘I shall let circumstances guide me,’ she said one day, with a quiet little smile. It was the evening of the first wearing of the red geranium, and her eyes had recovered their brightness and her complexion its soft ivory tint, and there were no more shadows or hollows anywhere about her face.

And as she said it she fingered the blossoms in her crape. Mr. Berrithorne was coming up the garden walk to us.

The thought just crossed my mind, that perhaps now he would not be refused. Seline was very open. At least she had been so before this sudden change in her prospects, and she talked over our new curate and his intentions just as frankly as at the beginning she had talked over the unfortunate Mr. Barrington. He was beginning to be foolish, she said, just beginning. It was the way with them all. You could not be bright and chatty and amusing without having it taken advantage of in that ridiculous way.

And then Seline would give her pretty little shrug, and push back the thick curls which almost reached her eyebrows, and go off into a merry laugh about the foolishness of men.

But this time she did not laugh. There was a certain business-like tone in her voice. She was calculating probabilities. And then Mr. Berrithorne joined us, and very soon they were pacing together up and down the shrubbery walk.

I wonder whether Mr. Berrithorne fancied there would be something out of place in continuing his pleasant little attentions to anyone in such deep mourning as Seline, even though there were flowers now amongst the crape, and returning flashes of brightness under the long silken eyelashes. He was a very gentlemanly man, also a man of the world, so far as a curate has any right to be that sort of thing. And if there did happen to be any impropriety in flirting with a young lady who used note-paper with mourning edges half-an-inch thick, I am sure Mr. Berrithorne was the last person to be guilty of it.

So very likely that was the reason that he began now to alter considerably in his behaviour. I might say there was almost as much change in him as in Seline herself, and a change also of the same subtle, impalpable sort, a little crust of something not part of himself, but put on; just as I felt that hardening and setting of her manner was not something which had developed itself naturally out of her own character, but was the product of circumstances.

However that might be, Mr. Berrithorne was no longer so amenable to Seline's influence. He was becoming now very much taken up with parish matters. These matters involved frequent conferences with my sister Anne, whose life was lived in being useful to others, and above all things in lightening the burden of my father's labours. I think, if I judged people now by Mr. Forrester, Anne judged them by

their ability to enter into and promote the welfare of Willoughby. She sometimes told me that she had a growing respect for Mr. Berrithorne, because of his anxiety to be a real help in the parish. He did not just go through the church services and then let things alone, but he was always working amongst the people, and seemed so very anxious to get the parish into a really satisfactory condition. And he was quite dropping that careless, society sort of manner, which he had when first he came.

Anne and I were not in the habit of discussing other people's personal affairs, so I had never told her what my own impressions had been about Mr. Berrithorne and Seline. And Anne was far too simple and unobservant in such matters to have formed any opinion for herself. She walked steadily on in the performance of her

duty, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. To be a help and a stay, first to my father in his now declining strength, and then to the rest of us whom her patience and steadfastness could serve, this, and not any care of marrying or giving in marriage, was my sister's aim. And, knowing it, I kept my speculations to myself.

Of course that amateur concert had to be relinquished, also any thought of tableaux or outdoor entertainments this summer. But Mr. Berrithorne had set his mind upon raising funds for that mission-room, and he now proposed what had been hinted at before, namely, a sermon or two in the fashionable churches of Burstborough. I suppose he must have made the acquaintance of some of the clergy there, for he had already been invited to preach at St. Aidan's, a very handsome,

newly-built church at the south end of the town, amongst all the grand houses. And there had been a paragraph in the *Burstborough Chronicle* about the sermon, which was praised as indicating uncommon pulpit power. Perhaps Mr. Berrithorne was going to be a popular preacher. I could myself testify to a great amount of eloquence in his discourses. They were decidedly above the average, both as to composition and energy; and then his voice was so good and his action so effective, that one almost forgot, in listening to them, the absence of any predominating spiritual element. But then it seemed to me, from the first, that Mr. Berrithorne was not ruled by the spiritual side of his nature. He was a man for society and of society. He did not shine by a steady, overmastering light from within. He reflected the colouring and qualities of those

amongst whom he moved. With Seline, at least until just lately, he was trifling, frivolous, merry, ready to enter into any little amusement that might be proposed. With my sister Anne he was equally ready to enter into any plan that might be discussed for the benefit of the parish. One would think, to hear them talk, that Sunday-schools, sick-visitation and mission services, were the element in which he lived. With my father he would criticise books, pick out the weak or strong points of a sermon, discourse upon the tendencies of modern thought, go into details of parochial management and so forth. Then, if one of the country gentry chanced to be announced, he was equally ready to talk about the appearance of the crops, the prospects for shooting, and the state of the markets. Mr. Berrithorne was an exceedingly clever young man all round,

though profound in no special direction.

Also he was a man who was quite able to keep his intentions to himself, else I should not have been so taken by surprise when, one morning as my mother and I sat alone in the morning-room, she told me that he had expressed to my father his desire to become engaged to my sister Anne, and had asked permission to visit us for that purpose. This permission had been granted, though as yet no mention of the matter had been made to my sister herself.

I had of course noticed the great falling off in his attentions to Seline, but that seemed to me natural enough under the circumstances, for the manner of those attentions was not such as would have been suitable to crape tucks half-a-yard deep. I should think good taste as well as the Regent Street mourning regulations, would have suspended them for a season,

though Seline evidently intended to make that season as brief as possible. But at the same time I had not noticed anything out of the ordinary course in his behaviour towards my sister. He had not appeared to seek her society more than was necessary for the transaction of business connected with the numerous parochial interests which they shared in common, and certainly her manner to him had never been tinged with that consciousness which precedes love as surely as twilight precedes the day. I also thought I knew Anne well enough to be sure of this, that she would never give any man sufficient encouragement to warrant him in asking for her life-long affection, unless she intended to give what he sought. There was no pleasure for her in conquest, no pride for her in sending away suitor after suitor with bowed head and heavy step. When

the time came for her to give her love, she would give it with all womanly dignity. Until then she would so hold herself apart, so live her life with maiden reserve, that difficulties like those which seemed to give its flavour and relish to Seline's cup of experience would never come in her way.

Therefore I was still more surprised when, a week or two after that conversation with my mother in the dining-room, she called me aside to tell me that Mr. Berrithorne had formally proposed to Anne the day before and had been accepted.

I will not deny that, during that week or two, Seline's temper had been trying. Her former child-like impetuosity and eagerness had quite passed away. There was still wonderful fascination about her, but it was purpose-like and premeditated. How Mr. Berrithorne withstood it I do not know. I think he was a man who

never let sentiment guide him, when the serious matters of life were at stake. To see him at first, playing tennis and practising duets with Seline, one would have said that any pretty girl might twist him round her finger. To see him afterwards, receiving the same treatment, but receiving it with such careful, studied politeness, going just so far and no farther, omitting no mark of attention which was due to Seline's altered circumstances, but giving it with such mechanical precision, one might have thought that he had had years of experience in Belgravian society—years which had taught him the exact limit to which he might allow himself to be drawn without compromise, and from which he could at any moment retire with honourable reputation untouched.

Seline soon perceived this. Her acuteness and penetration amounted to instinct.

I think where formerly she only amused herself, only aimed at bringing another victim into my father's study, she had now a more practical motive. Not that affection had anything to do with it, but the future needed some safe anchorage, and Mr. Berrithorne could supply it as well as anyone else. The withdrawal of his devotion was a trial which was visited upon himself with cutting coolness, and upon all the rest of us with strange chops and changes of temper. Those days were not happy days.

But worse were in store for us when Seline knew the real state of the case. However, the time for informing her of that was not yet come.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was on a Saturday morning that my mother told me about the engagement. That same night Anne and I had a long sisterly talk about it after we had gone up into our own room.

‘What on earth made you do it, Anne?’ I asked, with characteristic bluntness, as soon as we had got comfortably into our respective dressing-gowns.

Anne smiled. It was the smile of one who feels that the best gift of life has come to her, but come closed round with the shadow which besets all human joy, the shadow of incompleteness.

‘The same motive which makes most people do such things, I suppose, Marjorie,’ she replied.

‘You mean caring for him? It never entered my mind for a single moment that you would do anything of that kind. Somehow——’

I was going to say he was not the right sort of person for her, but I checked myself. That seemed a poor way of beginning one’s congratulations. Anne carried on the sentence for me.

‘Somehow you did not think I was the sort of girl he would choose. Well, I did not think it myself. But things never do fall out as we expect they will. And I have not done this hastily.’

‘You would never do anything hastily, Anne,’ I replied. ‘I know that well enough. But we have all been so happy together amongst ourselves until now.’

And there a strange rush of feeling came over me, and I doubled myself up and began to cry like a child.

Anne came close up to me, and we sat together there for a long time, quite still, only holding each other's hands, quick, magnetic currents of sympathy passing between us. Anne knew what was in my heart, I knew what was in hers.

By-and-by we came back to what could be put into the form of words.

‘Whatever is father to do without you, Anne?’

‘Why, Marjorie, he won't have to do without me at all,’ she replied, in just her quiet, cheerful way. ‘I can be more useful to him now than ever. There will be three of us to work together with one heart and mind, instead of only two. I don't believe the best man in the world could have persuaded me to leave father,

if I had not felt I could serve him better, so. Think how happy it will be for us all, to be planted down here together; Rowland belonging to us now.'

'*Who* belonging to us now?' I said.

And then it flashed across me that this was Mr. Berrithorne's Christian name. Rowland. Rowland. How that seemed to bring the whole state of the case home to me with conclusive vividness. Mr. Berrithorne was indeed belonging to us now, if he was to be called Rowland. And then another aspect of the change dawned upon me. If he was to be Anne's husband he would be my brother. And he would have to be Rowland to me also—my brother Rowland.

No, never that. And I felt myself tightening up inside. None to stand for me in the place our little Davie had left. Least of all Mr. Berrithorne. Not that I had the

faintest atom of unkindly feeling towards him, though he was making this great rift in our hitherto peaceful life, but I knew from the very first that he could never be anything to me but an outsider, pleasant and friendly most likely, and if useful to my father, then gratefully acceptable; but only, so far as I was concerned, an outsider. And his being my sister's husband would not bring him one inch nearer to me. He would still be Mr. Berrithorne, nothing more than that.

‘Oh! I forgot,’ I said. ‘Of course you will have to call him Rowland now. How very strange it does seem. And when did it happen?’

‘This morning, as I was coming home from the moor hills. I had been to see Bennie Bolton, and Rowland was coming across from the brickfields.’

‘This morning! And nothing in the

air ever whispered it to me. Why, I ought to have felt a kind of brooding of wings. And you were just the same as ever. And Mr. Berrithorne. I did not notice the least bit of change in Mr. Berrithorne.'

'No, I asked him not to say anything about it until I had told you myself. I wanted us to have a quiet talk about it together. It means a great deal.'

Down went my face again to hide the tears.

'Yes, indeed I wonder what there is that it does not mean, now that it has once come. Are you happy about it, Anne?'

'Very happy indeed, Marjorie.'

And my sister raised her head, which had been bowed upon mine, and she looked away, as if into some calm life beyond, and there was such a wonderful light of content in her eyes. Content, not joy. It was like the exaltation of the yet unveiled

novice on the eve of her renunciation—the novice who sees before her the life-long vista of years in which, with no clash and clang of outward tumult, she may serve God and do well.

‘I am very happy, Marjorie. I feel that I am choosing the path in which I shall have the best opportunity of being useful. I have always wished to devote my life to work for the church, and now I shall be able to do it.’

‘You *will* be a good wife for a clergyman, Anne. Mr. Berrithorne ought to be very thankful.’

‘And so ought I. I told him how much I longed to be of use, both to the church and my father, and that I did not think I could have left father at all, except to be still near him, as we shall be now.’

I could not help the thought creeping into my mind that the ‘now’ might be

but a short one. I mean Mr. Berrithorne had said to me more than once what a quiet, tame little place Willoughby was, and how a man's intellectual nature seemed to require city life to expand it to its fullest extent. This was said last in connection with a sermon he was going to preach at St. Aidan's for some charitable purpose; not the brickfields. Mr. Berrithorne often preached for different things in Burstborough now, and always drew large congregations. And the thought came over me as he said it, that he felt himself something like an oak-tree in a flower-pot, amongst us feeble village folk.

‘And what did he say to that, Anne?’

He said he should never want me to leave father. He said how beautiful it would be for us all to be here together, just the same as before, only that I should belong first to himself. Of course that is

so, you know ; but after that, to father and the rest of you, just the same. And we should go about together and see the poor people, and we should be able to do so much for them. He said he should never weary of the quiet peaceful life that we should gather about us here.'

Then I had misjudged my future brother-in-law. He was *not* yearning after the glories of a city pulpit and a fashionable congregation. And the clear light in Anne's eyes, the beautiful smile upon her face, convinced me that her heart was in what she was doing. So far I was comforted. And with a good-night kiss I left her to brood in silence over her future.

At the same time there was to me, when I came to think about it, an element of unreality in the whole thing. This prevented me from feeling really at ease about it. I still believed that if Anne had been a girl

of more enterprise and self-appreciation, Mr. Berrithorne would not have won her consent so quickly. Also, if her power of realising the future had been equal to her desire of present active usefulness, she would have hesitated.

But duty was her ideal, duty which centred round my father and the parish. That being so, and Mr. Berrithorne having convinced her of his own love for her, as well as of his own equal devotion to the purposes which stirred her life most deeply, her quiet, constant heart accepted as God's will for her the human affection by which, apparently, a door was to be opened to wider and more permanent usefulness.

Would the future justify this venture from the safe moorings of the past? Would the love of husband and father be allowed to dwell together, equally measured, in her heart? Would life give her the

happiness of blossom and fruit upon the same tree? Must not the one fall that the other might come to its perfection? For there is no pausing in life, however fair the standing place where the two roads meet. Take one or take the other, let the true heart choose for itself; but both of them the truest heart can never take. Still of this I was sure, that Anne would never be other than a faithful wife to the man who had power to win her from the shelter of her father's home.

CHAPTER IX.

So my sister's engagement to Mr. Berri-thorne became an accomplished fact, and the day after it was accomplished he rode over to Burstborough and brought back a most lovely ring, which, however, Anne said she should not wear at present, as we did not wish to invite gossip over our family affairs. Indeed, except to my Aunt Sunshine and Seline, the engagement was for the present to be kept a secret.

Seline was entirely taken by surprise when told what had occurred. Anne commissioned me to convey the intelligence to

her. I do not think my sister had ever taken much notice of the little flirtations between our guest and Mr. Berrithorne. She was not one who busied herself with the fancies of other people, and she was singularly deficient in observation of their actions, except so far as such actions needed to influence her own conduct. We might have had half-a-dozen curates, and Seline might have made conquests of them all, singly or in mass, before Anne would have found that anything out of the ordinary routine of tennis-playing and duet practising had been going on. She practised to perfection the art of minding her own business, and the science of allowing other people to do the same.

Seline was more observant. But I do not think even Seline suspected, any more than I did myself, what was in Mr. Berri-thorne's mind. She saw, she could not

help seeing, that his attentions towards herself had relaxed, but they had not been to any noticeable extent transferred to my sister, simply because Anne was not a girl upon whom little frivolities and nonsenses could ever be expended to any purpose. She had no small coin of wiles and tricks and glances to give in return. Flirtation is a game which takes two to play it, and both must know the rules if there is to be any amusement. Anne did not so much as know the rules of the game ; and therefore Mr. Berrithorne must make his advances from an entirely different direction, namely, the direction of common points of interest in the parish. And seeing them made in that manner, Seline apparently supposed, as did the rest of us, that they only referred to the speedy erection of that mission-room at the brick-fields.

‘It is ridiculous, Marjorie, simply ridiculous,’ she said, when I told her, by my sister’s request, what was the true state of the case. ‘The very idea of Anne doing such a thing! Anne of all other girls.’

‘Of all other girls!’ I replied. ‘Why, I thought it was the very thing you recommended her to do not many weeks ago, in order that she might be at liberty to wear black velvet. You see, she has taken you at your word.’

‘I never said she was to marry Mr. Berrithorne in order to get herself into the black velvet,’ said Seline, with a bitter little laugh. ‘He is the very last person in the world that I should have expected a grave, quiet girl like Anne to have taken up with. Just the way with those demure people. They go walking straight on, and you never find out until the end that they have had eyes at the back of their heads

all the time. I suppose it is this precious new mission-room at the brickfields that has been at the bottom of it. But I beg your pardon, Marjorie. I have no business to talk so about your sister. Only, as I said before, it does seem ridiculous.'

'I can't see anything ridiculous in it myself,' I replied, not taking any heed of Seline's little burst of temper. 'I am dreadfully sorry to lose Anne at all, but Mr. Berrithorne being my father's curate, and being settled down here amongst us, it does not seem to go so very much against the ordinary course of things.'

'Oh! dear no,' and again Seline laughed her little bitter laugh. 'It is exactly the thing one hears of over and over again. Excellent young man, highly recommended by bishop of former diocese, settles down in remote country parish, hasn't very much to do, naturally becomes intimate with

family of rector, daughters charming, falls in love with one of them, marries her, goes into housekeeping on a microscopic scale, experiences delights of a limited income, has an unlimited family, and after bringing them up on oatmeal and skim-milk in said parish, gets a living somewhere else, and ends his days in peace and plenty on two hundred and fifty pounds a year. There, you have it all sketched out. But I don't believe you mean it, Marjorie, not a bit of it.'

'Mr. Berrithorne does,' I replied, quietly. 'At least, he has given Anne a most lovely engagement ring.'

Seline shrugged her shoulders.

'The generous creature! Why is not Anne wearing it?'

'Because she does not wish to make her affairs the property of the parish. We shall not speak of the engagement at

present. Only, of course, it was right that you should know, being one of ourselves.'

'Thank you. You may trust me not to say a word. And what is the ring like?'

'It is a plain gold band, with "*Mizpeh*" upon it in little diamonds.'

'"*Mizpeh*!" What a goose to have that put on, when they are going to live in the same parish. Why, it means "The Lord keep watch between me and thee when we are parted the one from the other." And they don't mean to be parted, unless he quarrels with your father.'

'I am glad you know the Scriptures so well, Seline,' I said. 'We shall soon have you able to go through the church monuments and give book, chapter and verse for the texts upon each.'

Seline curled her pretty lip disdainfully,

and then gave her shoulders another defiant shrug.

‘You mean Job and Lady Matilda. I did hunt it up that very night, for one does not like to look like a fool when one is staying with a clergyman. But I knew about Mizpeh, ever so long ago, when we were in that out-of-the-way station beyond Lahore.’

‘Did you have more time to read your Bible then?’ I asked.

‘Not particularly, and it hadn’t anything to do with the Bible, except finding it there. It was only some one gave me a ring with it on, and of course I wanted to know what it meant.’

‘Was that still another one?’ I inquired, for really Seline’s attachments, or approaches to them, seemed innumerable.

‘Yes, you might call it another one, I suppose. It never turned out anything

much, though, for papa said I was very foolish about it, and he made me send the ring back. But all the same I had found out what the *Mizpeh* meant, and it is simply stupid for lovers who are always going to be popping in and out upon each other, to choose such a one. Why, they might have a telegraph wire from the rectory chimney to Mrs. Dumble's, or set up a couple of looking-glasses in the gardens and sun-signal to each other. You know the troops used to do that in our hill-station, and one of the young officers taught me. It was really most convenient. But, honestly, Marjorie, out and out, do you really mean that Mr. Berrithorne is engaged to your sister Anne? You are not joking.'

'Not in the least. They are really and truly engaged, and Anne said I might tell

you. Although, as I said before, we do not wish it talked about.'

'And I won't talk about it, you may be sure, when I have once properly given her my congratulations. Marjorie.'

And Seline faced round upon me with that curiously sharp expression in her eyes.

'Marjorie, it is her godmother's money. You will never make me believe that it isn't her godmother's money.'

I choked down my anger and surprise as well as I could, and replied with dignity,

'There has been nothing at all said about money, Seline.'

Of course not; why should there be anything said when he knows all about it already? Oh, I can understand it all. There has been a difference ever since we

were talking in the garden, and that wretched little brat of a godchild came up in connection with the tableau of Red Riding-Hood; and then you remember I told him about Anne having all those thousands of pounds that the old lady had left her. That fully accounts for everything. Mr. Berrithorne would no more have thought——’

I interrupted her.

‘Seline, you must not talk in that way. You have no right to make any such insinuations.’

The sharp light softened out of Seline’s eyes. If she had been the Seline of a month before, she would have rushed up to me and covered me with kisses of penitence. But she had quite given over being impulsive now, and was only lady-like, except when stirred into unjustifiable contempt.

‘I forgot, Marjorie. I haven’t any right, of course. I think it just the same, but I have no business to say it. Please accept my apologies. When is the wedding to take place?’

‘I don’t know. I should think Mr. Berrithorne will not begin to talk about that for a long time yet. At least, I hope not. Anne is quite young enough, and I am sure she will be in no hurry to go away.’

‘No. And then the money,—but I promised I would not say anything more about that. You and I will have to be bridesmaids, Marjorie, and you will see the whole parish will turn out, and there will be no end of a jubilation, crimson carpets, triumphal arches, Venetian masts, ropes of evergreens; and then, when the bride comes home, dinner-parties without end amongst the upper-classes. And after

that you will be left to yourself to get along as you can.'

With this exhilarating prospect, Seline tossed her curls defiantly back and went away, leaving me to my own reflections.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER that the change in her manner became more manifest. Even people out of our own family, Lady Matilda herself amongst others, noticed and remarked upon it; but by them it was attributed to the shadow which Major Consett's death, just before his expected promotion, had cast upon her future. I think my father and mother set it down to the same cause, and to sorrow for her father's loss as well, though not much was ever said about the sorrow.

Nor was anything ever said by myself

concerning the actual cause of the change. I was not really sorry for Seline, for I knew well enough that she never cared for Mr. Berrithorne, any more than for the dozen and one previous admirers who had from time to time beguiled the tedium of up-country life in India, or the monotony of a three weeks' run from Bombay to Brindisi. But marriage, in the altered condition of her worldly prospects, had become a question seriously to be considered. Village life was not according to her taste. She had frankly confessed that when my mother proposed that she should make her home with us for an indefinite period. But she had not the education necessary to supplement her pension by teaching, and as for sinking her own will and personality by becoming companion to a lady, in return for board and lodging and what would find her in dress and

pocket money, Seline was the last person in the world to bring her mind to anything of that sort. Therefore marriage, if it came in her way, was the most sensible alternative.

I am doing Seline no injustice in saying this, for she said it herself in discussing her future with us, not long after Major Consett's death. She never professed to look at things from a sentimental point of view. She used to say that life was a reality, and that you must get out of it as much as it could give you. If she had had enough to live upon, she told us she would never marry at all; but a pension of sixty pounds a year, with the trifle which she inherited in addition, was not in her estimation enough to keep the wolf from the door, and so marriage must come in to supplement it. Seline was a wise woman. It was under these circumstances

that she would have accepted Mr. Berri-thorne, most probably, if she had accepted him at all.

She behaved towards him now with a coldness and studied courtesy which rather embarrassed him. Indeed, it embarrassed us all. We felt as if in some way we had been doing something wrong, as if we had fallen short of what was expected of us, as if we had taken something which did not belong to us, as if we almost ought to apologise to her for things being as they were. I never knew anyone who could put such a difference into her behaviour, and yet not be rude, nay even be perfectly lady-like and well-bred. I think Mr. Berrithorne was often very uncomfortable, and nothing gave Seline more satisfaction than to make him so. A certain constraint was upon us all, while yet to those outside

we were the same peaceful, contented family as usual.

Aunt Sunshine, who was one with us in all our joys and sorrows, noticed the change in Seline's manner. She had never expressed a very decided opinion about Mr. Berrithorne. I believe she thought well of his talent and his capacity for work, though, like myself, she failed to discover in him those qualities which lead to high spiritual excellence.

‘But you know, Marjorie, my dear,’ she said to me as we were sauntering in the garden one day, not long after the engagement, ‘there are heaps and heaps of men, curates and clergymen too, who don't live what is called an exalted spiritual life, and yet their parishes are well looked after, and work is done, and churches are raised, and schools are built, and the

Establishment, as we say, retains its hold upon the affections of the people. Now you know Rowland Berrithorne will be a clergyman of that sort. He will get through no end of work, because he is not of a meditative disposition, and he will be popular with his people, and, in short, I don't think you need be anxious about it at all. Only——'

And Aunt Sunshine made a deliberate pause before she continued. I could not think what grave drawback was, after all, developing itself in her thoughts.

'Only, Marjorie, I do wish, more and more, that he was going to marry Seline, instead of your sister. I had a sort of idea at one time that it would have been Seline, and if it *could* have been——'

'Seline, auntie!' I said. 'Why what a curious sort of a clergyman's wife she would have made.'

‘Quite good enough for——’

And there Aunt Sunshine caught herself up.

‘Quite as good as a great many of them, and very well suited to a man who enjoys society like Mr. Berrithorne. A clergyman’s wife can do a great deal, socially, for her husband, and Seline would have helped him on in that respect. Whatever she made up her mind to do, depend upon it she would succeed in, sooner or later. That girl has an immense power of will, though she looks all on the outside. Since her father’s death, her character has come out much more strongly. I wish she had appropriated Mr. Berrithorne, though at the same time I think he has shown a great deal more discretion in appropriating Anne. Your mother says you have not begun to think about the wedding yet.’

‘Not in one way. I have scarcely

thought about anything else since Anne first spoke to me, but we have not begun to make any arrangements. Father says he would like them to have that pretty little house near the park gates, where old Miss Tenterden, the doctor's sister, used to live. It is to be let now, you know.'

'Oh! yes, with the two gables and the front towards Newcourt; yes, I remember Mrs. Dumble told me Mr. Rakeridge had it on his hands. That would be the very place for them, so quiet and retired, and so convenient for the church too, and scarcely more than five minutes' walk from your own door. The very place, dear me! how convenient; so cosy and dainty, and it would not take a great deal of furnishing, either. I wonder what Mr. Berri-thorne says about it?'

'Nothing yet; it will be time enough for that by-and-by. Anne is in no hurry.'

‘Of course not. Why should she be? And, even though she is to stay so near you, the parting *will* be a parting; it is never the same again when a daughter marries. And your father’s health now is not what it used to be; little things and little worries take hold of him more.’

I was silent. I never liked to hear anyone say that, though I felt it now myself, every day more and more. Yet, so long as I could keep it to myself, it did not seem so real. My father *was* failing in bodily health, very much; he never said anything about it. None of us did—I mean, none of us at home. But we constantly found ourselves trying to save his strength in little ways, at which, a few months ago, he would have smiled. Now he let himself be cared for, and I knew by that what a difference he must feel.

I tried to keep on talking about Anne.

‘You see,’ I said, going back to the subject of the engagement, ‘it is not as if he were a very old friend of the family ; we have to begin at the beginning.’

‘So you have. Still, my dear, you know it is a very good beginning.’

Aunt Sunshine said this more as if she were inviting information than laying down an ascertained fact.

‘A very good beginning. He had the highest testimonials, had he not ? And he is well connected.’

‘Yes, everything is right enough, so far as that goes. And people who have had opportunities of knowing speak warmly of him. At the same time, a man can only testify to his own character by his own life, and it takes time to live that ?’

‘You are a prudent girl, Marjorie,’ said my aunt, and she said no more.

We had now come to the summer-house.

She turned aside, and so did I, to rest there. Just so we had sat, a couple of months before, to watch the players on the lawn, my father and Anne, Seline and Mr. Berrithorne. Our favourite white-heart cherry-tree, which overhung the lawn, was in the pride of its blossoming time then, and the petals fell upon them like flakes of snow in the sunshine. We used to call that cherry-tree and the little damson-tree just behind it, the bridesmaid and the bride. They always came into blossom together. The rich knotted blooms of the cherry, with their creamy tint and interstices where the lovely russet-brown of the yet unfolded leaves showed through, were so like the boldly-wrought devices of a piece of grand old lace ; while the daintier, more uniform film of white over the damson-tree was like the transparent net veil which floats away over a bridesmaid's

dress. But now the blossoms were all gone, and, instead, a touch of deep gold was creeping over the yellow fruit clusters. So other things had changed too, and seemed ripening towards their end.

I was full of thoughts, chiefly thoughts for my sister Anne. The gates which had shut us in to the sweet past were flung open wide. She, at any rate, must go forward whither the path led. And our home without her could never be the same again. We told ourselves day by day that the change would not be such a very great one, that she would still belong to us as aforetime, that her interests would be ours even more than before, since, as Mr. Berri-thorne's wife, she would have a still closer tie to the church, and the parish, and the people. Yet somehow, I felt underneath it all, that we were only trying to persuade ourselves of something which was not really

so. The change had come. It was as if we were standing on the platform of one of life's stations. The signal had fallen, the railway bell had rung; far away, like a black speck in the distance, the train was coming. There would be a little waiting, a little bustle, then the farewell, the rapid rush, and whirl, and noise, and sweeping onward, followed by silence, and the lonely walk home.

‘When do the holidays begin?’ said Aunt Sunshine, abruptly.

She had been looking silently away to Newcourt all this time. Over the summer trees we could not see so much of it now, still its red brown roofs, high pitched and broken by their little dormer windows, showed warm in the afternoon light; and where the elms stood apart, there was its oriel window towards the west, clasped round with vine and ivy, and its terrace

with quaint old balustrades almost hidden now with their blossoming creepers.

‘The holidays?’ I said, startled from my reverie, ‘oh ! the summer holidays. They begin at the end of July.’

‘And this is the middle. And Mr. Forrester comes as soon as ever his school in the North breaks up.’

‘Yes.’

And that was all I found to say, though what a joy came with the saying of it ! What a flash, as of sudden sunshine, poured into my thoughts. Truly it was always there, a little golden heart of light under the sheltering leaves and boughs of my daily life ; but every now and again it sprang forth as if newly born, with such a glad surprise. And I looked at it, and laughed at it, and then laid it away again with many a kiss and caress, knowing it was there to flash out upon me soon from

its hiding-place with brighter light than ever. Always living, always upspringing. And for myself alone.

‘I don’t see why he shouldn’t come and stay with me this time,’ pursued my aunt, her face still towards the roofs of Newcourt. ‘You see, now that your mother has a permanent guest in the house, and your father not so very strong, she might be glad for him to be with me, and he could come over and see you whenever he liked.’

‘I thought he was too much for you, auntie.’

‘And so he was, my dear, when he took on those dreadfully unsettled ways. But he will have enough to do now, going backwards and forwards about the house at Burstborough, and getting furniture, and all that sort of thing. I should think very likely, after he has finished his visit here, he will take rooms somewhere near the

school, and stay there until the house is ready for him. I wish I could offer to go and help him. I believe he is the sort of man that won't a bit know how to begin upon chairs and tables, and making colours go well together. But I do think, Marjorie, it would be a very nice idea for him to come to me, instead of to the rectory. Will you ask your father about it? Here is your mother.'

Auntie rose, and we returned to the house.

The matter was mentioned to my father that evening, but he said he should much prefer Mr. Forrester coming to us, as at first arranged. And it was so.

CHAPTER XI.

I SCARCELY know how it was, but it seemed to me that much of the spring and brightness of life for all of us, passed away with the passing of that summer. There had been so many changes, none of them, as it appeared, really for the better, some of them giving us only cause for grave anxiety. There was my father's failing health, Seline's coming amongst us, the arrival of the curate, Lady Matilda's perpetual nagging, my sister's engagement. The old order was changing, giving place to new. Things would never settle down

again into their former peace and quietness.

Still I had my own little spot of brightness in the midst of it all, my two golden threads, one of memory and one of hope, lacing and interlacing life's sombre web. Often when I had an hour to spare, I would go into the church and stand by the old font, and live over again those beautiful little bits of the past which had been connected with it. Once again I was busy with my ivy, and I had come to the end of it, and I was mourning over my unfinished decorations, and a hand was stretched out to me full of the coveted branches, and a kindly voice said,

‘You poor child, you shall have them, then.’

And with that voice what a pleasant, quite new feeling closed me round, a feeling of having been considered, taken thought for.

New? And yet all my life I had been sheltered by a love so tender, so unfailing, and it had been enough for me. I had scarcely known what it was to reach out, even in imagination, to anything else. The years had come and gone with no want for me which the familiar faces of my childhood could not supply. Now a window had been opened upon new heavens and a new earth. It was as when spring time comes, and with it that strange longing to go somewhere far off and see the awakening of Nature, also to awaken with her and live.

It was settled then, that Mr. Forrester should come to us, not to Aunt Sunshine, and there were not many days before his coming. My sister Anne had gone to stay for a month with Aunt Drusilla, my father's sister, who lived at Dalton-by-the-Sea.

We always went there once a year, for a

month, at least one of us. It was rather a dull visit, for Aunt Drusilla, though the very essence of goodness, was not of our own way of thinking. Her sight was bad and we had to read aloud to her for hours every day, books of devotion or religious biographies. When the reading was over we used to walk up and down the beach until dinner time. Dalton-by-the-Sea is a dull place. The sea on one hand is flat, and the sand banks on the other hand are almost as flat, and the coast there has scarcely any bend ; it is just one long line of perspective to the vanishing point. Except in rough weather the waves have not strength enough to curl over and break ; they only idle up to the shore over the level sands, and back again with a feeble ineffectual murmur, as of a continual complaint which never gets itself attended to. When mid-day dinner was over we had

more reading of the lives of excellent people; and then, like Dorcas of old, we made garments for the poor.

But we did not, like Dorcas of old, stay at home to make them. Instead, we went to sewing-meetings, where there was still more reading of biographies, alternated with a gentle murmur of talk, quiet, ineffectual, but as unbroken as the lapse and flow of the tide upon the sand-flats outside. The little petticoats that I have begun and finished there, to the accompaniment of that gentle talk! The babies' vests and hoods that I have knitted, while some Broken Lily or Bud of Promise got through her simple life, and wrote her diaries, and peacefully died in the biography! The air castles of all sorts and sizes, some of them so fair, that I builded together in my own thoughts as that murmur of talk gurgled round

about me! Even Anne found it tedious at Dalton-by-the-Sea. But this time I told her that Mr. Berrithorne's letters would make a diversion.

We still kept the engagement to ourselves, not wishing at present to face the gossip which its announcement in the village would produce. Anne's absence gave me extra parish work to do, and so brought me into closer contact with Mr. Berrithorne. I found great difficulty in making up my mind about him, in what might be called his professional capacity. The social side of his nature I had, of course, become acquainted with in his frequent visits to our house. It was not exactly interesting, but at the same time there was nothing in it to repel anyone. Yet I seemed to know him as well in the first week as I did quite on to the time of Anne's marriage. She said that his letters,

whilst she was at Dalton-by-the-Sea, made her know him better and love him more ; but I never had the pleasure of correspondence with him. One thing astonished me very much, the placidity with which he bore Seline's cold and often contemptuous behaviour. Had he of set purpose jilted her, she could not have flung more cutting sarcasms at him. And had he been actually guilty of what she, on that one occasion, implied as his motive in becoming engaged to Anne, money-hunting, he could not have received those sarcasms with a more humble attempt at appearing unconscious of them. He was certainly very patient with Seline. I almost thought sometimes his patience amounted to meanness of spirit. But one so seldom comes across patience at all, under injuries, that when it is manifested one had better not question it too closely.

It did strike me, however, as I worked with him in the parish, that he was chafing somewhat at the narrow conditions of his life amongst us. Perhaps the reputation which he was making for himself at Burstborough contributed to this. As I said before, the tableaux and concerts and entertainments which we once meditated in aid of the mission-room had been given up, in consequence of Seline's mourning, or, to speak more correctly, the mourning which Messrs. Jay and Sons were accomplishing for her. And, in order to raise the funds which we at first hoped to realise by our artistic efforts, Mr. Berrithorne had preached several sermons at Burstborough. These sermons had been described by the local papers as in the highest degree eloquent and impressive, and certainly the offertories which

followed upon them were very satisfactory, so much so as to warrant my father in having estimates made for the new room. We thought that perhaps it might be built and opened by the following summer, and we said to ourselves that Anne's marriage might possibly take place at the same time. It would be interesting to have the two things united in our family history.

One result of these sermons we had not anticipated. Mr. Berrithorne began to be much called upon for charity occasions. Other parishes in Burstborough or elsewhere, that wanted new mission-rooms or stained windows, or enlarged vestries, or restored chancels, applied to him for half-an-hour's exercise of his 'soul-stirring eloquence;' and Anne's betrothed bid fair to become a star in the diocesan firmament.

I could not quite understand this, for in the sermons which he preached to us at Willoughby, I could never discover that nervous vigour, that electric force of sympathy, which, in newspaper phraseology, makes a congregation 'hang upon the lips' of its minister. In fact, I always found myself thinking of how he said a thing, rather than of the quality of the thing itself. And once, half playfully, I told him that I was quite surprised at his having such a reputation in Burstborough, when we of Willoughby seemed scarcely to have awakened to his merits as a popular preacher.

He explained it by the fact that numbers always animated him. With a large congregation he said he felt as if he could do anything, could rise to any height of eloquence, and command indefinite resources of language. He was never really

at his best, he said, except before a town audience.

‘I rather begin to think,’ he continued, —we were walking home together from the brickfields, when we had this conversation,—‘I rather begin to think that I am wasting myself here. You see these village people don’t seem to appreciate anything but the steady, jog-trot style of preaching. If you fire up at all, or let your imagination have the reins for a minute or two, why, they think the world is coming to an end. Now you know, Marjorie——’

I always winced when Mr. Berrithorne called me by my own name. I could not quite realise that for the remaining term of our natural lives I was to be as a sister to him.

‘You know, Marjorie, I haven’t been accustomed to the jog-trot style. I want

to fling myself out and have a good canter over the open country. I feel a little cramped here; I miss the stimulus of a city congregation. You can't think what a difference it makes, preaching to a cultivated congregation.'

'I daresay you do find us rather slow,' I replied, and I did not feel in the least snubbed by being placed, together with the rest of my people, amongst the great uncultivated, if by that class was meant those who could not fully understand Mr. Berrithorne. 'I believe, as a rule, country people do like to keep the old paths, and so long as they can order their lives peacefully and honourably by so doing, it is better not to force them into new ones. I suppose preaching is something like writing. A man in writing addresses himself to those whom he supposes to be in sympathy with him, and his

thoughts must flow out more freely so. But a preacher cannot always take for granted, as an author can, that the people he is addressing are of his own manner of thought. Very often he knows that they are not.'

'Yes, and he knows, too, that the best things he has to say will not be appreciated by them. It does damp one so, not to be appreciated.'

I could understand that, too, knowing how pleased in my own little way I had felt when Mr. Forrester listened to and was interested in what I had to say to him. Only there was this difference, that in ordinary conversation one says things for the avowed purpose of proclaiming one's own opinions and manifesting one's own self; whereas in the preaching of the Gospel, another, and not one's own little self, should be the central point.

I was silent, and Mr. Berrithorne continued,

‘I had a letter only this morning from the vicar of St. Luke’s. You know St. Luke’s, don’t you? that big church next to St. Aidan’s, holds the biggest congregation in Burstborough, though St. Aidan’s is the most fashionable, because you see it is in the parks, where all the swells live. I believe it is a fact that the dressmakers go to St. Aidan’s on a Sunday morning on purpose to see the new styles. Scarcely such a congregation to be seen out of London. Think of that!’

‘How thankful the vicar must be,’ I replied, ‘to see that he preaches the gospel to such good purpose. Fancy such a thing as that being said of the congregation in the upper room where St. Paul preached his very long sermon. But what was it about the vicar of St. Luke’s?’

‘Why he wants me to preach there for him on Sunday night week, when they have a special offertory for the clergy fund. It is attentive of him, isn’t it? because, of course, that is a great occasion with them. A man naturally likes to have a good collection when it comes into his own pocket. I begin to think, Marjorie, that I am getting known in Burstborough. You see where a man is found to—to——’

I hurried to help Mr. Berrithorne over the little difficulty. Of course he felt a shrinking from keeping on so with the implication of his own praises.

‘You mean when a man has that sort of talent he is picked up and trotted about for the benefit of the public, just like a good amateur actor or a girl who has a fine contralto voice. I think, Mr. Berri-thorne, you will have to go to London. All the superiority of the country, whether in

preaching, acting, or singing, gravitates there. Has a man gifts? Then London claims him.'

Mr. Berrithorne looked at me for a moment, as if not quite sure whether I was in earnest. But it was only a moment.

'I believe you are right, Marjorie. I have felt for some time that sooner or later London would be the place for me. You see I should have scope there. It is such a relief when a man feels that he has scope. I shall not be surprised if I find my way into one of the metropolitan pulpits before very long. You know Cannington of St. Luke's, who has just asked me to preach for him, has a brother somewhere out Kensington way, from whom I might quite possibly get an introduction.'

Then we were silent for awhile. Mr. Berrithorne must have been turning over

in his own mind such a brilliant possibility, for after the pause he said,

‘I must say I should uncommonly like it. There is no place like London for sharpening a man up and bringing him to his best. But whether or not, I feel that I have begun to make my mark, and that is everything.’

Mr. Berrithorne repeated that last word ‘everything.’ And with this exposition of the end and aim of the modern ministry, our conversation ended; for Seline came in sight, and joining us, began to cut up my brother-in-law elect with her usual quiet sarcastic little speeches.

CHAPTER XII.

It was now the end of July. Mr. Forrester was to come to us on the next Saturday.

Two or three days before that, Aunt Sunshine came down to see us. She seemed very disappointed that my father would not let her have our guest all to herself.

‘I should never have let him come to you that Easter,’ she said. ‘I might have been sure that when you had once got hold of him, you would want him to stay at the rectory again. And really he did take on such an unsettled fit that first time, that I

felt having him again would be more than I could manage. But now, as I said to Marjorie, things are very different, and he might just as well be at the cottage. Are you sure now, David, that you have quite made up your mind for him not to come to the cottage?’

My father replied, in his quiet but very conclusive way, that the arrangement had better stand as it was.

‘Very well,’ and Aunt Sunshine looked just a trifle grieved. ‘It is all my own fault for letting him slip away from me at Easter. But anyhow, he must spend as much time with me as he can, I shall expect that. And, Phyllis, I have been thinking that instead of getting out at the station here, he might stop at Stilbury, and I would take the pony carriage over and meet him. It would be pleasant for him to have the drive through the

Willoughby woods, instead of coming all the way by rail. And Marjorie, if you could go with me, you could show him the church and the old market-house, whilst I do my shopping.'

Dear, good, Aunt Sunshine! I believe that with the eyes of her loving heart, vision so clear because so absolutely unselfish, she had seen the yet unfolded blossom that I was guarding so silently, and would let in upon it such sunlight as she could. And she did this, as she did all else, so simply, with such genuine, unconscious kindness.

I could but say I should like very much to go, if my father and mother did not need me at home on that Saturday. But indeed, as we should not need to start before eleven for the hour's drive to Stillbury, I could get through all my little domestic duties in the morning, and help

my father too, if, in Anne's absence, there was anything to be done in the parish. As it happened, however, there was nothing special to be done, and both father and mother said they should be very glad for me to go.

‘All right,’ said Aunt Sunshine, brightly. ‘Then, Marjorie, you come to me at eleven on Saturday. Your father will write to Mr. Forrester, to tell him to take his ticket only as far as Stilbury, and we will meet him there by the midday train, and you show him what you can whilst I do my shopping, and then we will go to the “Feathers” and have lunch, and drive leisurely home through the woods. I am sure he will enjoy it a great deal more than the other way, if only we can have fine weather. I shall really be quite glad of an excuse for going to Stilbury, for I want two or three more of those old-fashioned blue

bowls. Do you know, Phyllis, my little maid has been so "misfortunate," as she calls it, and broken the only pair of them I had left? You can't get them at any other shop than Smith's in the Stilbury market-place, and I don't think you will get them there much longer. People are buying them up so, because everyone mistakes them for old china.'

'Then pray get me some, too,' said my mother 'if people mistake them for old china; for those deep bowls are so useful when the summer fruit is about, and I really grudge my Crown Derby for strawberries and cream. Get me half-a-dozen, will you? and I will put the dear old Derby safely away on the drawing-room shelf.'

'Where it always ought to have been, Phyllis, my dear. It has astonished me many a time that you could give up that

bowl to strawberries and cream, though they do taste so much better out of it. But you won't tell anybody that the Stilbury bowls are only sixpence each. It isn't the people about here who buy them, for nobody knows ; but it is London, Smith tells me, where they all go. People put them up for decorations, and on a black oak sideboard I can tell you they look perfectly lovely, and, if the housemaid knocks them over, you are able to retain a lady-like self-possession. Well, then, half-a-dozen, and I shall want as many for myself, and you will not fail to be ready, Marjorie, on Saturday at eleven.'

'Ready for what?' said Seline, who just at that moment came in with a black velvet belt which she was going to embroider for her dress.

'Aunt Sunshine is driving over to Stilbury on Saturday,' replied my mother, 'to

meet Mr. Forrester, instead of his coming all the way here by rail. Marjorie is going with her, and they will do some shopping.'

Seline laid down the belt, and began to trace with her finger an imaginary design for the embroidery which was to be done in steel beads. My father had gone away. Aunt Sunshine was standing ready to go too.

'It would be a good opportunity for me to see Stilbury also ; don't you think so ?'

Seline said this with no great show of eagerness, indeed she was seldom eager over anything now. She just went on drawing her finger over the black velvet, but her eyes had a look as if they were seeing something else.

'I have often heard you say, auntie, what a lovely old church it is, and that

market-house must be positively delicious. I really should like to see it.'

'Not this time,' said my aunt, with that little touch of sharp decision which she generally manifested when dealing with Seline. 'I do intend you to go with me some time. I generally take Anne and Marjorie over for a day, and I thought we would arrange it this year when the wild strawberries are ripe, which will be in about a month, and we will all of us have a picnic dinner in the woods. But I must have Cranbrook's wagonette for that, and then we can put in as many as we like. You see, in the pony-carriage there is only room for three, and Mr. Forrester will make that number coming back.'

The way in which Aunt Sunshine settled the matter left no room for argument. Once Seline would have coaxed and pouted

and teased, and perhaps gained her point so; but she had given all that up now. She said quietly, but with just a tinge of displeasure,

‘Very well, then I can stay at home. It is not of very much consequence, and I have my Indian letters to write; one can always be writing Indian letters.’

Upon that Aunt Sunshine went away. I walked down the garden with her, and as I was opening the gate I said, with no desire, I must confess, that the suggestion should be favourably received,

‘Supposing, auntie, that I should stay at home, and let Seline go instead?’

But Aunt Sunshine fired up.

‘Not a bit of it, my dear; you shall do nothing of the kind. If I had wanted Seline to go, I could have asked her myself from the beginning. I intend you to go with me to Stilbury, or we do not go at

all. Now, there is an end of it. Don't say another word. It is my own arrangement, and I shall just manage it as I like. You have nothing to do but be ready on Saturday at eleven o'clock.'

And ready I was, with no other shadow upon me than that produced by a certain coldness in Seline's manner. She proposed walking with me to the cottage. The pony-carriage was there ready, and Aunt Sunshine herself, looking as bright and cheery as possible until she saw my companion, and then a shade of annoyance passed over her face; perhaps not annoyance, rather inquiry. Aunt Sunshine was never one to hide her feelings.

'I have not come to go with you,' said Seline, calmly, 'I only thought I would take this little stroll with Marjorie before settling down to my letters. I hope you will have a very pleasant day. I should

think the church and woods will look beautiful in the sunshine.'

I took my place in the pony-carriage. As I did so my dress caught upon the lamp. I was ever so long in disentangling it, but Seline, who stood close by and saw my difficulty, never offered to help me. That was her way of intimating that she thought me selfish in going without her. If she would but have pouted and made a fuss I could have been more comfortable.

Aunt Sunshine came quietly round and disentangled my dress for me. She gave Seline a look, but no more. Then she shook the reins by way of letting Jessie know that she might start, and away we went, Seline standing calm, moveless, like a black cashmere lay figure in a dress-maker's shop.

'Good-bye,' she said. 'Aunt Phyllis and I will enjoy our lonely day as much as

we can. I hope you will do the same.'

With this neatly-planted sting she turned away, not once looking after us.

It did not hurt me. I knew that both my father and mother were willing for me to go. And as for Seline——

'My dear,' said Aunt Sunshine, to whom I made some remark about it, 'Seline is quite able to take care of herself for one day. It will do her no harm to spend a little time in meditation when the Indian letters are done. Besides, your father told me this morning that he was driving over to Mr. Rakeridge's moor farm, and should take her with him, so it is your mother who will enjoy the loneliness, and she is always able to do that. Now be content.'

I gave one look back. Seline was walking away, not homeward, but in the direction of the moor hills, rapidly, impatiently, as though she were getting rid of her bit-

terness in that way. I could only hope that it would pass off so, else there might be trouble ahead for us. I had never had any difference with Seline yet. We had always got on wonderfully well together, but I knew well enough that she had a temper, and that perhaps expediency, less than conscience, prevented her from manifesting it. Now for the first time I had, with no evil intentions, distinctly vexed her, and the chances were she would find some way of making me feel it.

But my disquiet cleared away, like mists in the sunshine, when we got out towards the Willoughby woods. It was a day of days. I think the sun never shone so brightly before, nor cast such cool, soft shadows across the country-side, upon the yellowing corn and the warm brown earth of the ploughed fields; nor ever touched into richer gold the lichens on the grey

copings of the cottage roofs, nor pencilled in clearer, daintier outline the little ferns that grew out from their crannied niches all along the stone walls by the roadside. And before we reached the Stilbury station, far down in the valley, we saw the curling vapour, white upon the dark fir woods, of the mid-day train, the train that was bringing Mr. Forrester to us. To watch that thinning vapour, to trace by-and-by the black line of carriages beneath it, to listen in the silence of the summer noon, as we drew Jessie up outside the station, to the gathering rush and roll of the wheels, to hear the bell rung, to see the signal dropped, to catch the portér's familiar words as the train began to slacken speed, 'this side for Burstborough;' how pleasant it all was !

'You get down, Marjorie,' said my aunt, 'I can trust myself better to hold Jessie.

You know the noise frightens her sometimes when the train starts again.

‘I think I can manage her,’ I replied, ‘you had better go.’

Auntie understood.

‘All right,’ she said. ‘Then you wait here.’

She went herself into the station, and five minutes afterwards came back with Mr. Forrester. Then the whistle sounded, but I looked no more for the train after that.

Mr. Forrester was just the same as ever, though he was going to be second-master of the Burstborough grammar-school. I could tell that from the very first. Aunt Sunshine looked so pleased. The gladness shone and sparkled all over her face.

‘Now, Marjorie,’ she said, ‘I have told him what we are going to do. You are to show him the church, and be sure you

don't forget the Newcourt monuments. And then there is the old market-house to go over, and you must go down to the town and see the cross, and then I think there will be time for you to get into the woods before you come to me at the "Feathers," at half-past two. Don't hurry, because I have plenty of shopping to do.'

And, gathering up the reins, she started Jessie away to the blue bowl shop, looking back upon us with such a happy smile.

I was going to say she looked almost as happy as I felt myself, but that could not be. Such a good joy as mine that day comes only in the freshness of youth, and even then comes but once. I had such a brightness of unrestraint from the very first. Somehow I did not feel at all afraid to let Mr. Forrester see that I was really glad to see him. I think I was too happy

to be self-conscious. Something in his look, in the warm, hearty grasp of his hand, told me that he came back with the same kindly heart, that we should take up the old story as we had left it. Farther than that I never looked. It was a perfect 'now' which folded me in its own light and warmth.

And so we wandered through the old church, and amongst the graves, and then down to the cross, and into the fir-woods by the Hall, where the wood-pigeons were cooing, and the squirrels leaping from bough to bough, and where the tall fox-gloves began to show crimson low down on their spikes, and the wild arums held up pale purple fingers through the folding green of their leaves. And back again in sunshine, always sunshine, to the quaint, old-fashioned town, with its one straggling street, and its queer little shop-

fronts, with their leaning gables and overhanging eaves, and straight on past the market-house to the 'Feathers,' in whose porch Aunt Sunshine was already standing, waiting for us. And before we came up to her, Mr. Forrester turned to me and said,

'I am very, very glad to come back. Are you glad too?'

And I said from my heart, though I could not look him in the face as I said it,

'Yes, indeed I am.'

CHAPTER XIII.

AUNT SUNSHINE and Mr. Forrester did most of the talking as we came home, he driving, she sitting beside him, I behind, happy enough in my quietness.

There was much to be told. Auntie wanted to know all about the new appointment; when the school would open; what he was going to do about furnishing; when the house would be ready to go into; who would help him to choose carpets and curtains; how many boarders he would be likely to have, and whether he had succeeded in finding a suitable matron.

Then there were the changes which had come to pass since he was at Willoughby the Easter before. Seline's appearance amongst us, and the advent of the new curate, though auntie did not tell him of the difference Mr. Berrithorne was likely to make to us. That was still a piece of family history kept to ourselves alone. And as she chatted on so merrily and gaily, I listened, only listened, her voice falling like summer rain upon the leaves of my content.

My father and mother were in the porch to receive us, but no Seline. Afterwards came Mr. Berrithorne, who was to dine with us that evening. We did not all assemble in the drawing-room in due form before dinner. I think my father had wandered away into the study, and my mother was with him. Mr. Forrester, Mr. Berrithorne, and I were standing in the

bow-window, waiting for the gong to sound, when Seline made her first appearance.

I think she had dressed herself with more care than usual. The crape was now, after three months' use, entirely discarded, and instead she wore a full, flowing black grenadine, with orange nasturtiums in the belt and at the throat. The belt was the velvet one she had begun to embroider in the morning before we started; so it occurred to me that the Indian letters could not have been written. Certainly it made a very pretty addition to her toilette, and the flowers tucked into it so carelessly seemed to bring out into more artistic relief the dainty leaf and stem embroidery, which she must have accomplished with such wonderful quickness. But Seline was quick in everything she undertook. I think she had but to look at a needle and thread and the work was

done, or to fling a flower at her dress and it took root and grew in the very position where it could most enhance her charm.

Mr. Forrester was presented. She acknowledged the introduction almost carelessly, and at once turned away from him to me, saying,

‘I am very glad I stayed behind, though it did seem a tempting opportunity for seeing the church. Mrs. Haseltine would have been so dull all alone. Your father had arranged to be out most of the day too, but of course you would know that. I hope you had a nice day.’

It was not much to say. Still there was something in Seline’s manner of saying it which ruffled me. Her words implied that I had been seeking my own pleasure, and leaving her to take care of my home duties. And Mr. Forrester was standing by, hearing it all. There came

over me at once a feeling of restraint. It was as if a frosty little finger had been laid upon my warm heart. The remark was too unexpected for me to frame any reply. I could only look awkward, feeling that I had been misunderstood, forced into an untrue position in the presence of one with whom I desired to stand well.

I was beginning to make some sort of explanation, when the gong sounded for dinner. We drifted unceremoniously into the dining-room, where my father and mother were already standing at their places. I heard Mr. Forrester say to Seline,

‘Where does Miss Marjorie sit?’

‘Oh! by Mr. Berrithorne, *of course*,’ replied Seline in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone. And upon that Mr. Berrithorne said, drawing back a chair for me,

‘Come, Marjorie.’

I made up my mind there and then that

I would privately ask him not to address me by my Christian name again, until he really did belong to the family. It always had vexed me that he took matters so for granted, and when we ourselves desired that the engagement between him and my sister should not be made known. However, that too had to pass. The present was no time for instructions and explanations, and Seline took her place by Mr. Forrester, whilst I was told off to Anne's customary seat by her betrothed, to appear as pleasant and unconcerned about it as I could.

Seline looked very handsome that evening. One could scarcely recognise her now for the saucy little coquette who had half startled and half amused us, three months ago, by the detail of her flirtations on board the *Tussorah*. Apparently she was not now bent upon securing any

special admiration for herself. She was very quiet, satisfied to look, as I am sure she must have known she did look, her best. I felt she was taking notice of me, criticising me, and that intensified a certain constraint which was every moment tightening round me, taking from me all power to be natural, or even passably agreeable.

I wanted to have it out with her. Yet what was there to have out? She had said nothing, done nothing, which did not dissolve into thin air when one attempted to put it into shape. It was too vague to be attacked, too intangible for one to defend oneself against it; and yet it was already making the fair, clear sunshine of my content a thing of the past.

I had no more speech with Mr. Forrester that evening. He was with my father in the study most of the time after dinner,

and only came into the drawing-room quite late, to find Seline with unwonted devotion holding a skein of worsted for my mother—the first time in our experience that she had ever done such a thing—whilst Mr. Berrithorne was explaining to me his ideas of the talents and qualifications essential to popular preaching, explaining them, too, in such a clear, distinct voice that I am sure everyone in the room must have had the benefit of his opinions. So we said good-night to each other, and for me there was a dreary ending to a day which had begun brightly enough.

Next morning, as we sauntered into the breakfast-room, there was again the disposition of our seats to be arranged. Seline quietly took her place on that side of the table where two chairs had been set; and, scarcely looking at Mr. Forrester, remarked in a casual sort of manner that

the flower-beds on the lawn showed very prettily from that point of view.

‘I always think,’ she said, ‘that it is so much more interesting to have a garden to look at, than only the ornaments on the opposite wall.’

Very naturally Mr. Forrester accepted the implied intimation that he was to be Seline’s companion on that side. I was now in possession of the other, all to myself, and that was of course how it would be during the whole of his stay with us. The thought suggested itself to me that he had over-readily accepted the position, and perhaps that gave a certain touch of distance to my manner towards him. Things were going on again just as they had left off the evening before. I was growing more and more annoyed, more and more ill at ease, though I could not in the least have explained why. Indeed, I

could but compare myself to a bad-tempered child who sulks when everyone else is smiling, and who, when pressed for a reason why, only sulks the more.

After breakfast Seline proposed a walk, as the morning was so lovely.

‘Uncle Davie will take possession of you if we do not,’ she said gaily, as she came across the hall with her garden hat, into the trimming of which she was weaving some flowers, ‘so I think we had better be beforehand. Do you want very much to be talking metaphysics all the morning in the study, Mr. Forrester?’

As she said this, she gradually moved away towards the door, drawing Mr. Forrester after her, and I followed as a matter of course. How I did envy the grace of Seline’s manner, the unconscious ease with which she always did what for herself was the right thing at the right

time. Now, if I had proposed that walk, it would have been in a shy, hesitating sort of manner, conveying to Mr. Forrester the impression that I was very anxious for it myself, but did not want him to know that I was anxious, and so was trying to make it appear as if the whole thing was of no consequence. And the result of all this self-consciousness would have been a bungle, just like Anne's attempts, and my own at putting the flowers on our dresses ; they looked as if they had been hammered in with nails, as Seline encouragingly remarked when we presented ourselves for her approval. Now it was the apparent spontaneousness of whatever Seline did, that is when she decided upon spontaneousness, which was so effective.

‘Let us go and make a call upon Mrs. Dumble first,’ she said, when we had got out upon the tennis-lawn. ‘We can think

of a nice walk when we have done that. The poor old body complains that we never go near her now that she has set up a lodger.'

'A lodger!' echoed Mr. Forrester, 'where can she have discovered such a curiosity. I did not think there was such a thing to be met with in Willoughby.'

'Oh! Mr. Berrithorne has rooms with Mrs. Dumble,' explained Seline, 'and so of course we do not often go.'

I do not know what there was in her manner of saying this, which irritated me so. It was a simple enough explanation, yet it was given so as to imply a world of possibilities.

Mr. Forrester looked at me for a moment, then turned quickly away. He did not ask for any further information on the subject. Indeed, looking at it in the light of common-sense, what further information was needed?

Again I felt that I had been placed at a disadvantage, yet so subtly that even to attempt to extricate myself would have implied consciousness of what perhaps, after all, was quite inadvertent ; and so my efforts would land me in a worse misunderstanding than before. I was never ready of speech. Perhaps the best thing I could do would be to be silent. And so Mr. Forrester and Seline had the conversation to themselves across the pretty bit of meadow and pasture land which lay between the rectory and Mrs. Dumble's cottage, whilst I thought my own thoughts, which indeed were bitter and impatient ones.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE good woman was busy, as was her custom at that time of the morning, amongst the poultry. A comely specimen of a henwife she looked in her striped jacket and linsey petticoat, with a capacious holland apron and bib, and a broad brimmed straw hat well tilted down at the front, to keep the sun from her eyes. She had a big bowl full of boiled rice, potato scraps and bits of fat, and this savoury mess she was scattering broadcast amongst the feathered family, who clucked and quacked round about her, with the com-

fortable complacency of fowls who know that the lines have fallen to them in pleasant places.

‘Come in, young ladies,’ she said, curtsying low as she caught sight of Seline and myself at the gate of the poultry-yard, and then curtseying lower still as Mr. Forrester’s broad shoulders loomed above the palings. ‘Come your ways in. I was just reckoning up, Miss Marjorie, as there’d be a good half-dozen couple of ’em to send to Burstborough Thursday market this week, and as fine a sample, too, as you need wish to see. Them Cochinchinas of yours beats Lady Matilda’s into fits. Jonathan and me was up at the Hall farm last night, and the poultry-woman showed us every bit round the yard, and as proud as Punch she looked of her Cochins ’cause of their bunchy legs, as some folks thinks it a beauty, and good layers I don’t doubt they

may be ; but if it's for the table you want 'em, I say don't have 'em then, for they've nothing of a breast to look handsome on a dish, and their necks that long that make 'em look neat in the trussing you *can't*—no, not if it was ever so. They're over-much like her ladyship, is them Cochinchinas. They go about putting their noses into everythink, and nattering and worrying while they can't get a bit of plumpness anywhere. There's temper in poultry same as there is in Christians, and them that has a contented mind gets fat on it.'

Mrs. Dumble had emptied her bowl now, and would have us into the cottage, the poultry-yard being, to her thinking, not a pleasant place to stand in.

'Come your ways in,' she said, 'and sit you down. I hope it's good news that you get of Miss Anne. I lay you don't

feel like yourselves without her. Will you go through into Mr. Berrithorne's room? He's out, and will be for a bit, and I'm sure he won't mind your sitting yourselves down there.'

'No, thank you,' I replied, abruptly, for we had had enough of Mr. Berrithorne, for a time, at any rate. 'Let us stop in the kitchen. It is a great deal more comfortable.'

'Just as *you* please, miss, though I'm sure he wouldn't mind a bit not if you was to rest yourselves there as long as you liked; for a pleasanter gentleman and a more agreeable there needn't be, and reg'lar into his meals to the very minute, which makes such a difference when there's only one to do the work. But, if it's the kitchen you prefer, miss, then the kitchen it shall be.'

And Mrs. Dumble led the way, pausing,

however, as she passed the parlour door, which was open. Mrs. Dumble was proud of her parlour, though not so proud now, I think, as when she had her china shepherdesses and pug-dogs displayed in a row on the mantelpiece. Mr. Berrithorne had put cigar-stands and spill-cases in their stead, and some pieces of pottery.

‘The gentleman has his own hornaments, you see, Miss Marjorie, and, if they please him, why, it don’t make no odds to me, and never would, not while he’s so well-suited as he seems to be, though I will say he’s as particular as most that I’ve had to do with, and won’t look at a cutlet if the crumb and egg isn’t to a nicety. Not as he ever has that to complain of with me, for your mother can testify that I’m not easily beat when it’s to send up a dish with everything that’s proper, and I always say I’d a deal rather have a gentle-

man to do for that respects his meals same as Mr. Berrithorne does, and enjoys a bit of fresh fish with the fancy sauce as Mr. Rakeridge is very good in sending over a basket of it now and then, and I'm not the woman to object to trouble, same as a many would.'

Mrs. Dumble here paused in the current of her speech, and stepped back to give us a better view of the interior of the parlour. Seline stood on tiptoe and peeped over Mr. Forrester's shoulders with a pretty air of maidenly indifference and disdain.

'It's exactly like a man's room,' she said, 'just as ugly as ever it can be. I never knew a man yet who knew how to make the best of things. Marjorie——'

And she turned rapidly round towards me as I stood well back in the passage.

'Marjorie, would you mind if I went in and pawed about a little amongst his

things, and put them into shape for him ?’

And without waiting for a reply, she went boldly in, and with a few deft touches, such as a woman of taste knows so well how to give, she soon completely altered the aspect of the room. She draped the stiff, common curtains, making them look positively artistic. She disposed the mantelshelf ‘hornaments’ into groups, instead of having them ranged in a stiff line from end to end. She pushed the centre table into a corner, so as to give a space in front of the window, with its screen of crimson geraniums, and then she began to break up into picturesque disorder the books, which, with the instinct of a tidy housewife, Mrs. Dumble always sorted into mathematical figures upon their respective shelves. Here and there, apparently from feminine curiosity, she peeped into one.

‘Browning,’ she said, opening the first,

an elegantly-bound volume, which did not look as if it had been much read. ‘Oh! I won’t have anything to do with him, he is too metaphysical. He makes life a burden with his involved sentences. I have not cut my wisdom teeth yet, and so I have to feed accordingly. Mr. Browning, stand up straight in your shelf, and make a prop for your neighbour. Now then, who is my neighbour?’

Seline was really quite amusing this morning. I had not seen her so bright for many a day.

‘That sounds like a text,’ she continued, tumbling the books about, ‘but I haven’t the ghost of an idea where it comes from. Here is one that looks more tempting. “Hints on Church Decoration.” That may be useful to all of us. “M. Haseltine, Willoughby Rectory.” Oh! Marjorie——’

And Seline shut up the book in a hurry and slipped it aside, as if she had inadvertently happened upon something which ought not to have been taken any notice of.

‘I am so sorry. I *do* beg your pardon.’

And then she ceased her chatter, and made a distinct pause of some moments, in which we might all think what we liked. The impression she gave was of having made a mistake and being excessively annoyed by it.

Mrs. Dumble was the first to speak, not perceiving the situation, except in its external bearing.

‘Law! now, to think,’ she exclaimed, less in admiration than wonder, for she was a conservative in matters of household polity. ‘It do look to me as if it was sided out for a spring cleaning, but if that’s the way the quality likes it, I’m not the woman

to say a word. When I was in housemaid place, afore I took to the cooking, it was always the table in the middle, and something set in the front window, and your hornaments straight on the chimbley-shelf, and what books there was laid neatly round, with the biggest at the bottom, and the white antimacassars to a line on the chair-backs, as its many and many a time I've slipped in and straightened them after there'd been a caller. But that's a good while ago, and fashion's a thing that changes. Leastways, and when all's said and done, if I tell Mr. Berrithorne it's the young ladies from the Rectory has done it, he'll be right enough, I warrant.'

All this time Mr. Forrester had stood in the room, speaking scarcely a word. He seemed occupied with his own meditations. Now that Seline was giving finishing touches here and there he came out to me

where I waited in the little narrow passage, and said,

‘So Mr. Berrithorne also takes an interest in church decoration.’

I don’t know whether he intended my thoughts to go where they did, but they flashed straightway to the old font in our church, the font which I had been decorating when he came in and gave me those ivy stems; the font by which, a little later on, we had been standing when he asked from me one of those stems and put it so carefully in his pocket-book.

I felt my cheeks grow red. It was the first time he had recalled those two days once so pleasant, now dropping farther and farther down into the deep well of the past. Why should he say anything about them when all was so different? Yes, so different, though he had not been twenty-four hours under our roof. A strange

feeling of wounded pride came over me. It seemed to me that he had no right to be keeping those days in possession, or holding them up again before me, things being as they were.

I murmured a few indistinct words, and then said it was time for us to go.

‘Come along, then,’ said Seline, gaily, ‘I think we have spent pains enough over Mr. Berrithorne’s belongings. Marjorie, do let us go straight home and fill our pockets with biscuits and then go and have a good long day on the moor hills. And let us go home by the plantation instead of across the field, for I am sure Mr. Forrester will enjoy that lovely bit of wood walk.’

I did not say, and he did not appear to remember that he had already seen it, so we bade farewell to Mrs. Dumble and started.

But I was not to accomplish even that little distance in peace. We had scarcely

reached that bend of the path at which, four months ago, we caught our first glimpse of Lady Matilda, when Mr. Berri-thorne himself came out upon us, apparently going towards the rectory.

Seline addressed him with unusual cordiality.

‘Good-morning, Mr. Berrithorne. We have been altering your room for you, at least I have. Marjorie would not help me at all. I told her she was quite too proper.’

‘I am sure Marjorie need not have been afraid,’ said our new curate. ‘She is very welcome to do whatever she pleases with my things.’

Again that rapid quiet look from Mr. Forrester. And Seline rattled on.

‘I told Mrs. Dumble she kept the room painfully neat, and so I tumbled everything up. It is really comfortable now. I

shall consider it a slight if you move the things back into their old places. A man never knows how to make the most of his books and ornaments, and his chairs always look as if they were listening to a sermon. Are you going to the rectory, Mr. Berrithorne?’

Mr. Berrithorne said he was.

‘I thought so.’

She stepped lightly forward to Mr. Forrester’s side, there being only room for two to walk together on the narrow path, and they went on, leaving me to have as pleasant a *tête-à-tête* as I might with my future relative.

CHAPTER XV.

THAT was the beginning of a dreary time for me ; all the drearier for that I had once thought it would have been so pleasant. I could but say over and over to myself the words I had read in a sweet old story long before :

‘ Alas ! how easily things go wrong,
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long ;
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.’

Yes, truly, never the same again. And yet what had I done, or what had I left undone ? Why could I not be bright and merry and cheerful like other people ?

No trouble had happened. Things were going on as usual. Neither death nor sickness had visited us. Indeed, according to a sensible way of looking at life, we had everything to be thankful for. Why, then, did I feel as if some great boa constrictor were wound round about me, moment by moment closing me more tightly in its soft, silent, deadly grasp, so that I could neither speak nor struggle?

Mr. Forrester was quite kind, but it was a grave, distant kindness now, which had even a sort of rebuke in it. In what way I had grieved him I could not tell, and I was too proud to ask. Indeed, before two days of his visit to us had passed, I escaped swiftly out of his way if by any chance we were left alone together. It seemed to me as if there were no air to breathe, or as if the great serpent were giving itself an extra coil, or as if a mir-

ror were being turned upon my inmost self and I had to reveal all, receiving no vision in return. The misery of those moments, when no third person formed a medium between us, was supreme.

Not that such moments often came. I could generally, by good management, prevent them. I was much more clever at that sort of management than the other, by which some girls contrive to keep an agreeable companion at their side indefinitely. And Seline helped me.

Seline had recovered a good deal of her brightness since Mr. Forrester came. She was sometimes in almost radiant spirits. Not childish any more, or saucy, or petulant, but simply fascinating because of her grace and vivacity. Even to poor Mr. Berrithorne she relaxed. We saw no further manifestation of that cutting, sarcastic behaviour which had been almost as

embarrassing to us as to himself. She could scarcely, even yet, be called genial to him. There was a perceptible difference between the courtesy he was allowed to experience, and the soft radiance of the smiles apportioned to Mr. Forrester; but still the change was very welcome, removing, as it did, a most painful constraint from our little home circle.

As for Mr. Forrester, he was quieter than ever. It was evident that Seline had 'impressed' him.

As soon as that fact had firmly established itself in my mind, I faced it, as many a girl had doubtless done before me. I shut up my beautiful past, put it sorrowfully out of sight, as one does some favourite musical instrument which is broken beyond all hope of repair; and began to live, as I could, with what was left to me.

I had pride enough to keep my thoughts to myself. I would not, as Seline had done in the case of Mr. Berrithorne, alter my behaviour one whit. I think I was more polite to Mr. Forrester after he had been with us two or three days, than at the beginning of our acquaintance. After all, as I said to myself, what had happened that I should make such ado? I had built a house upon the sand. I had been a fool. That was just the plain, unadorned English of it. My imagination, ever ready to realise the ideal, had converted mere kindness and friendly interest into the golden coin of love; and therefore now, staking my position upon it, I was bankrupt. What remained for me, after discovering my blunder, was to keep the discovery quiet, and not call in my friends and neighbours to rejoice with me, as sometimes even the pleasantest of one's

friends and neighbours are ready to do upon such occasions.

I think it soon became apparent, not only to myself but to the rest of us, that 'another one' had been added to Seline's noble army of martyrs. A pretty little touch of consciousness crept into her manner. She accepted, with a curious mixture of coquettishness and meditative reserve, the arrangement now generally taken for granted, that Mr. Forrester should be her companion in our country walks, and her partner on the tennis lawn; whilst Mr. Berrithorne, who of course was a constant visitor at the house, naturally fell to my share. There was no longer any necessity for Seline to contrive this. It was contrived for her.

I was sorry for Mr. Berrithorne, because I knew it must be a dull time for him. Still, if I did not entertain him much with

my conversation, he had his own thoughts to fall back upon, and they, with a prospective wife of his own choosing, and a tidy unincumbered fortune, could not but have been pleasant ones. So far as I was concerned, my only desire was to keep out of people's way and to occupy myself as much as possible with the necessary affairs of the house. When I was obliged to be on social parade, I gave diligent heed to it that my facings were pipe-clayed, and my accoutrements bright, and my head well held up, and my general deportment soldier-like. Everything else I contrived to keep to myself.

Meanwhile, Seline smiled and wore flowers to perfection. The flowers now were Marshal Niel roses, of which we had an abundance in our garden. Anything so lovely as the contrast of their large, proud, curling leaves with her black dress

and the creamy softness of her complexion, I have never seen. I used to gather them for her myself, the proudest and yellowest I could find. She was very gracious to me. We never recurred to that morning when she had been left alone. I think she was content that things were going on prosperously. She could afford to tolerate me, nay even value me, as a background upon which her own grace and fascination and capacity for wearing brilliant colours came out in more splendid relief.

We had only now to wonder when the regulation interview in the study would take place, and how it would end. Would another suitor pass down the gravelled walk with bowed head and dejected step, as Mr. Barrington had done, and as Mr. Berrithorne ought to have done, if considerations of his own had not come in the way?

I rather fancied there would be no pacing down the gravel walk this time. On the former occasion Seline wanted amusement. Now she wanted an establishment. My utmost vividness of imagination could not realise her sending Mr. Forrester away after she had once brought him to her feet. I could not realise it, even if the second-mastership of Burstborough grammar-school had been what is called a 'poor thing' instead of a good seven hundred a year. Still less could I realise the possibility of Seline's wishing to stay and be as a sister to me after Anne's marriage. Might Heaven defend me from that, if it defended me from nothing else!

But one could never tell what Seline intended to do, any more than you can tell what figures will come up when you give a kaleidoscope its next turn. In her case the past was no guarantee for the

future. You could only be safely and comfortably sure of one thing, namely, that she would do what she thought best for her own convenience. But I am writing bitterly.

That week wore itself to a close. Mr. Forrester was leaving us on the Friday, to go into rooms which he had taken at Burstborough, not far from the Grammar School. The former master had vacated the house at the beginning of the holidays, and it was now in the hands of paperers, painters, and whitewashers. Then there would be the choosing of furniture and decorations. And then, as Lady Matilda, with a ponderous attempt at pleasantry, remarked, the choosing of a wife. For Mr. Forrester did not seem to have any sister to speak of, and a house like that must have a lady at its head.

The last evening had arrived. I had

kept well to myself all the week, and indeed it was not difficult to do that ; for the most of his time was spent with Seline or my father. Aunt Sunshine had asked us over there once or twice, but somehow Mr. Forrester did not seem to care to go ; and as for auntie herself, I don't think she spent more than a couple of hours with us during the whole of that week. Auntie could show a difference in her behaviour as well as Seline, and perhaps she was just a trifle vexed at the want of readiness which her former guest had manifested in accepting her offer of hospitality. I know this, that she did not come over at all during the latter part of his stay, and she was out when he called to say good-bye to her, though he had told my mother the day before, and my mother had told Aunt Sunshine the hour at which he intended to present himself.

But on this last evening, he asked me, with that grave, kindly sort of manner which was now quite habitual, if I would go out for a little walk with him. I think I was too much taken by surprise to decline. At any rate I found myself going down the wood path with him, and neither Mr. Berrithorne nor Seline there to produce the 'medium' now so necessary to my mental comfort. I did manage to keep the conversation to strictly indifferent subjects, being determined that none others should be introduced. I had become accustomed now to the part I had to take. A girl of moderate common sense does not require more than a week to adapt herself to circumstances which are to lock down the whole of her future life. I had lived within the boa-constrictor's folds so long, that I was becoming comparatively accustomed to them. And I

think the creature must have been getting torpid too, for I did not feel its pressure either tighten or relax. Should I spend my life so? It was a pleasant prospect. But so long as I had vitality enough to preserve my own self-respect, and to let Mr. Forrester see that if he did not care, I did not—that, in fact, a snake's folds were rather comfortable surroundings than otherwise to spend one's days in—it would be all right.

Coming home we had to pass the church. To my surprise he took the keys out of his pocket, and said we would go in.

That was premeditated. He must have gone to Jonathan Dumble's cottage and got those keys before we started. However, I raised no objection. If it was his pleasure to step over graves, and have me do the same, well and good. I could face the ordeal. I could face anything, and

make no sign, so completely had I conquered myself in this one little week. It had been a tough battle, truth to tell, but I was victorious. And now, come what might, I carried with me the calm which is only given after victory.

So we went in.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was the little door through the vestry at the chancel end by which we entered. The church always had an unfamiliar look to me, coming into it from that end. It was like looking at a picture in a mirror. Everything is just the same and yet the whole effect so different. And it was stranger still to-night, for the low evening sun, streaming in as it so rarely did upon the windows at the north side of the church, woke them into a glow and glory which made the place seem as if set on fire of heaven.

That sunlight touched into living gold the halo round the head of the Child Christ, whom St. Christopher, there in his window at the north corner, was carrying across the waves. I had never known before, what richness and colour lay hidden in that window, waiting for the sun which could so seldom come to waken it. Perhaps also I had never had other than a very dim insight into the meaning of the legend, nor more than a vague longing after the blessedness of those who, through the waves of this troublesome world, carry Him at whose voice they sink, and there is a great calm.

With not a word spoken between us, we walked down the aisle, past Lady Matilda Rakeridge's pew, past the pulpit from which Mr. Berrithorne so frequently now let loose upon us what the Burstborough newspapers called a burning torrent of eloquence, past

the melancholy old rector's monument, or rather I should say the melancholy monument of the old rector, whose closing inscription had brought to light Seline's deficiency of religious knowledge, and through which, as a child, I had so often spelled my tedious way during what then appeared to me the over-long discourses of of my father.

‘There the wicked cease from troubling,
And there the weary be at rest.’

Mr. Forrester went straight on towards the west end, for the purpose, as I supposed, of going out at that little door by the belfry chamber stair, and so home across the orchard. But at the font we paused.

‘Marjorie,’ he said.

I started. Was that to be the way? Was he also to use my own name? And now!

But looking quickly up into his face, I

saw there only the grave sternness of disappointed trust, saw it now for the first time. And in the whole wide world there is no sternness which smites like that.

Still it can only smite those who have betrayed it. And I was no traitor.

‘Marjorie,’ he said, ‘I want to tell you here, standing by this old font, where I said good-bye to you a little while ago, that I wish you much happiness.’

Much happiness? Well, under the circumstances it was kind of him to wish me that, and I thanked him with such brevity as was consistent with politeness.

‘I hope,’ he continued, and I felt he was still looking down upon me with that same grave, stern kindness, though my face was turned away—‘I hope Mr. Berri-thorne will be everything to you that you can desire, and that you will both be very happy.’

‘Thank you,’ I said again. ‘I have every reason to believe that Mr. Berri-thorne will make a good brother-in-law. That is all I require from him for myself.’

Mr. Forrester turned round upon me, and laying his hand firmly upon my shoulder, made me go a pace or two backwards. I should have slipped down the crumbling old steps, if I had not held myself up by the font.

‘Marjorie, do you mean to say you are not intending to marry Mr. Berrithorne.’

‘Certainly I am not intending it,’ I said.

A strange mist came over me, rayed through and through with wild gleams of light, but as yet I could see nothing clearly. Already the deadly coil was loosening. I did feel *that*.

With his firm grasp still on my shoulder, Mr. Forrester continued,

‘Seline Consett told me when I came to Willoughby a week ago to-night, that he was going to be Mr. Haseltine’s son-in-law.’

‘Yes, and so I expect he is. Mr. Berri-thorne is engaged to my sister Anne.’

Michael Forrester took his hand away. I think I was the firmer of the two then. In a low voice, as if saying the words only to himself, he muttered,

‘What have I done? What have I done?’

May God forgive me, if upon the blackness of that moment, one flash of lightning joy, vivid, beautiful, smote suddenly across, revealing all that might have been, before the gloom of what now must be, closed over us. And that lightning flash slew the serpent that was coiling round me, and I was free, if only free to die.

My hand had strayed unconsciously to the old font cover, where even yet a few ivy leaves remained. Mr. Forrester laid his upon it. Both were cold, cold as the ironwork itself, or the bones of the old craftsman who had wrought it five centuries ago. And then, with one long earnest look, a look in which we read each other's good-bye, alike to past and future, and with no other word spoken between us, we came away.

But as we turned, the low evening sunlight was streaming more brightly than ever through St. Christopher's window, and not only the glory round the head of the Child Christ, but the worn face of the weary saint shone as with a radiance from heaven itself. And the waves through which he toiled were turned to gold by that setting sun, so that they seemed as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, even that

glassy sea upon which they stand, the saints of God, the happy ones who have overcome, and are at peace for evermore.

CHAPTER XVII.

I CAME home and went straight to Seline's room, the little room over the porch, which I had once made so bright for Mr. Forrester. It was bright still, with the yellow roses which clustered all round the window, and their brightness was dashed with flecks of purple from the loose leaves of the great clematis which was now in full bloom. Purple and gold, but even so, not so bright as my St. Christopher's window in the setting sun.

Seline was there altering the trimming on one of her black dresses. She had just

knotted up a satin bow and was holding it at a little distance to judge of the effect.

‘ Yes, with a Marshal Niel it will be just the thing. It is fortunate for me that Marshal Niels are so plentiful here. Marjorie, *could* anything be more lovely than that sulphur rose upon the black satin, unless the satin could have been bronze or golden brown. But one cannot have everything.’

No, indeed. And there were ‘ could have beens ’ for me just then, more important than the tints which harmonized with Seline’s complexion. I took no heed of the roses, nor of the exquisite arrangement of the satin bow. I only burst at once into what I had to say.

‘ Seline, what have you been telling Mr. Forrester ?’

‘ What have I been telling Mr. Forrester ?’ she repeated, just turning her head for a

moment to look inquiringly at me, and then reaching out through the open window to pluck a rose. 'What *do* you mean?'

'I mean, what have you told him about Mr. Berrithorne?'

'Nothing, that I am aware of. What should I have to say about Mr. Berrithorne? Marjorie, you need not glare at me in that manner. It really is not lady-like; it does not suit your style. You and Anne are not made for theatrical effects.'

'I don't care what we are made for just now. I want you to leave off playing with roses, and tell me why you said that about Mr. Berrithorne.'

'When you can tell me what I said,' replied Seline, calmly, 'perhaps I shall be able to tell you why I said it. At present I really do not know anything about it.'

‘You said that Mr. Berrithorne was engaged to me.’

‘Oh! dear no,’ and the quiet, business-like look on Seline’s face never changed one whit. ‘I did not say anything of the sort. Why should I, when it is not true?’

‘Then will you tell me *what* you said?’

‘Certainly. I said Mr. Berrithorne was about to enter the family as a son-in-law.’

‘Then you had no business to say it,’ I replied, ‘for you know that we do not speak about it yet. And you said it to Mr. Forrester in such a way as to intimate that I was the one. At any rate, that is how he has understood it.’

Seline began to gather up her bits of satin.

‘Marjorie, you are very strange. I do not know what has come over you. I believe I said to Mr. Forrester nothing but what was perfectly true, and I am not

responsible for the manner in which he understands things.'

'Yes, you are,' I replied, impatiently, for her absolute indifference exasperated me. 'You *are* responsible, for when you begin to say a thing, you ought to go on and say it properly to the end. You have no right to stop at intimations. It is annoying to me, and I should think it must be very annoying to Mr. Berrithorne, too.'

With the utmost leisureliness, Seline folded up her satin, laid it carefully back in the box, then flung the rose out of the window.

'I am not going to argue with you, Marjorie, whilst you are in such a temper. I had a perfect right to say what I did say, and I shall not withdraw it. I am excessively sorry that you should have been caused any annoyance, but Mr. For-

rester's misunderstanding is not my fault. I cannot help his putting his own interpretations upon appearances.'

And, with an amount of dignity quite overpowering in such a very small and slender person, Seline swept past me out of the room.

That night Mr. Forrester left us, to go to his lodgings at Burstborough. After he had gone, my mother came into my room, and told me that in the morning he had proposed to Seline, and had been accepted.

'Yes,' I said, quietly, 'I thought it would be so from the first.'

'I did not,' replied my mother. 'I must say it has rather surprised me. But I hope it will be all for the best. It is a short acquaintance on both sides, to end in such important results.'

And then we began to talk of the very

quiet life which would be left for us when these two weddings, so unexpected a few weeks ago, should have come to pass. It was late when my mother left me. There was something in her good-night kiss which seemed to give us more completely than ever into each other's love.

I think it was the following morning's post which brought a letter from Anne. She was anxious to come home, having already been away nearly a month; but Aunt Drusilla's health was very unsatisfactory, and it scarcely seemed right that she should be left alone. Anne said she would stay a week longer, and then see how things were. My aunt, she said, had no real illness. She was only weak, perhaps affected by the hot weather. She had given up going out, except for an occasional short drive, and was unable to attend the sewing-meetings, so that time

hung rather heavily upon her hands, and it seemed more than ever necessary that one of us should be with her for companionship, though no actual nursing was required.

A good thought came into my mind. I might have said a bright one, only that there was no such thing as brightness for me, now.

‘Mother,’ I said, ‘why should I not go to Dalton and keep Aunt Drusilla company for awhile, until her health improves? You say I am a tidy housekeeper, and if the worst came to the worst, I don’t think I should be a bad nurse. And then Anne must naturally want to be home now, even more than I do.’

My mother looked earnestly at me for a moment or two. We were alone together in the summer-house when this letter was read. I wonder whether, with the quick

instinct of her watchful love, she felt that I should be better away. But she never searched into my inner life, never questioned my motive for anything.

‘Of course Anne must prefer to be at home now,’ she said. And for awhile that was all.

‘Then you think I might offer to go?’ I inquired, after a pause.

‘Yes, certainly. Indeed, you need not even offer to go. You can write to Anne to-day, and say you will start to-morrow morning. You will be in time enough to spend two or three hours together, because, now the days are so long, she need not leave until the evening. We will talk to father about it. I think he will say it is a good plan. At the same time you know, Marjorie, you have always found Aunt Drusilla even more tedious than Anne finds her.’

‘It wasn’t Aunt Drusilla, mother, so much as the sewing-meetings three times a week; and as she does not go to them now, I shall not mind. I can always be company for myself. And the books that aunt likes are so simple that I can read them aloud to her and think my own thoughts at the same time.’

My mother smiled.

‘That is a wise economy of time. But I am very glad if you feel you can spend a few weeks at Dalton, and set Anne at liberty. She and Seline will have a fresh community of interests now. I can scarcely realise that Seline has made such a change in her future within the last few hours. Anne’s engagement came upon me very unexpectedly. Nothing either in her manner or Mr. Berrithorne’s prepared me for it, but this is far more so.’

‘But still, mother, you would not say

that nothing in Seline's manner, or Mr. Forrester's, prepared you for it. I think it very soon became evident that it would end in that way.'

'Perhaps. I cannot say I noticed it. One is never quite certain how to take Seline's behaviour. There had been so many experiences of this sort before, that one naturally fancied this one might end in the same way. I do hope they will be happy, though they are the very last people I should have thought would be suited to each other. Mr. Forrester dislikes society, and Seline enjoys it. Then I don't see how she will ever care to have anything to do with boys, and I believe the second master has forty or fifty of them in his house. It is really a serious undertaking for her.'

'You need not fear Seline's managing that,' I said. 'I believe Aunt Sunshine is

a very good judge of character, and Aunt Sunshine once told me that whatever Seline undertook she would make a success of. And then, with a good matron, she need have nothing to do with the boys.'

'Then she cannot be a helpmeet for her husband in the true sense of the word. But we must let it go. We will write to Anne at once. That is the first thing.'

And my mother rose to return to the house, taking my arm as she did so. Somehow I felt that there was a new bond between us now, Anne and Seline going forth to homes of their own, I staying behind at the elder and holier fireside to which the memories of a lifetime belonged. And I knew, too, that for me it would always be so. Death might come, and loss and change, but not Love again.

As we crossed the lawn, where the cherries lay golden-red in the grass, I

thought I would tell my mother one thing, and then all should be quietly put away.

‘Mother,’ I said, ‘Mr. Forrester knows about Anne’s engagement to Mr. Berrithorne.’

‘Indeed!’ and my mother looked gravely upon me. Nothing annoyed her more than the untimely revelation of personal matters. ‘How is that? I thought it was agreed that it was not to be spoken of.’

‘Yes. But Seline told Mr. Forrester the first day he was here. I should not have known anything about it, but Mr. Forrester said something yesterday. He thought, from what Seline told him, that I was the one to whom Mr. Berrithorne was engaged. Of course I was obliged to tell him then that it was Anne. But I am sure you may trust him not to speak about it. I did not tell him anything

more than that. I simply said that I was not the one concerned.'

My mother made no reply. I only felt, from her silence, that she was not pleased. The letter was written. I packed my things that night, and next morning at ten o'clock was on my way to Aunt Drusilla, to stay with her as long as we both should like.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT I should ever find my thoughts turned with anything like yearning desire towards a place like Dalton-by-the-Sea ; that its interminable stretch of dull beach, its low, bare sand-hills, its lazy lapping surf upon the black remains of submerged copses and plantations, its unbroken leaden sea, its more unbroken leaden sky, its monotonous rows of lodging-houses and bathing machines, should ever have presented themselves to my imagination as objects to be longed after with an almost infinite longing,—this was indeed having

the valley of Achor for a door of hope. I could not at one time have realised any weariness so utter, any misery so desperate, that Dalton-by-the-Sea should be a refuge from it. Nay, even Anne herself, who was never given to exaggeration, who took things as quietly and patiently as most people, always spoke of life there, and with Aunt Drusilla, as a mild form of penal servitude.

But now it was good to be there. I believe the entire monotony of it was the best thing possible for me under the circumstances. Its external life was so stagnant, so free from any demands upon thought and feeling, that the interior one could pass through its necessary stage of fermentation in wholesome quietness, not so much as a touch being likely to stir the vessel in which that process was going on.

Excepting that my Aunt Drusilla never

went out now, life was just the same in that quiet old house in one of the quietest old squares of Dalton-by-the-Sea. During the long mornings I always read aloud, either from my aunt's favourite books of devotion, or from the biographies of excellent people of more or less importance in the congregations and denominations to which they belonged ; but not, as it seemed to me, of any distinctive interest to the world at large. They were people who spent much time in good works, and who also spent much time in copiously recording the same in their diaries, not without a sidelong glance, as I sometimes fancied, at publication. Occasionally one of Aunt Drusilla's friends would come in and take a turn at the book, and then I used to make clothing for the natives of the Sandwich Islands ; for though our personal attendance at the sewing-meetings had

been dropped, still the sewing had to be done, all the same, and my aunt thought there was no better employment for idle young people like myself than doing it.

So the mornings passed. But in the afternoons, when my aunt had been wrapped up in shawls and mufflers, and disposed comfortably on the sofa for her two hours' sleep, I used to go out and walk up and down the long beach, far away beyond the esplanade, where the fashionable people never came, and where sometimes for a whole afternoon I met no one but a chance fisherman coming home from mending his nets in the sunshine. There I paced about, watching the ripples plash idly upon the ridgy sand, watching the shadows of the clouds shift over the distant grey waters, watching the steamers pass like black specks upon the horizon, watching the little brown-sailed fishing-

boats dip up and down with the tide, watching the black trunks of the long ago submerged trees that were once Dalton forest, come slowly into sight at low water, and then gradually disappear one by one as the tide rose, until it was just one wide sweep again of level, melancholy sea. Then when for very tiredness I must rest, I used to hollow out for myself a nest amongst the tall blue-green grass that grew so rankly on the sand hills, and there with only the sea-gulls for company, think my own thoughts, which were many.

There is no place like the sea coast, be it a coast never so dull and dreary, for getting oneself into shape again after the crushing and battering of some great, unexpected blow. One may call it monotonous, depressing, call it anything one likes in the way of abuse, grandmother ocean takes no notice ; rolls in, rolls out

again with her everlasting refrain, first of weariness and then of peace. And the vessels moving silently on in the far distance, have their word to say of other lands where other people suffer and are patient. And as they pass out of sight and are lost beyond the farthest headland, so will the deepest griefs that vex us now, all things but for a season, that season a short one ; the rest that follows, very long. And over the greyest sea comes now and again a white-winged bird, like a message of peace from skies where the sun is not always clouded. And when bird and sail have departed, and there is neither sound nor motion anywhere, one looks away to the faint line where sky and sea meet, and one knows that beyond it, somewhere, is the land very far off, to which some day our own little tossing boat will reach, and

we shall be at rest. All this old grandmother ocean teaches, and whether we will hear or whether we will forbear, her message is always there for us.

So for me the fermentation got itself done, no touch meddling with the wine of thought as, in those long rambles and rests by the sea-shore, it cleared. There only remained now that I should cast about for new bottles to put it into. For it is true of the wine of thought, as of any other, that you must put the new into new bottles, else the bottles burst and the wine is spilled. The sweet old ways of life, its habitudes so precious, the time comes when they can no longer hold the new thought. We must go out of ourselves. Again the old order changes, giving place to new. The past must be left behind; new wine into new bottles, new thought

into new surroundings, even if, with gentle
or bitter sadness, we whisper to ourselves,
in the silence of our own hearts,

‘The old is best.’

CHAPTER XIX.

Our life had been a changeful one enough since April brought that letter from poor Major Consett; but other changes, quite as unexpected, began to be talked about whilst I was away at Dalton-by-the-Sea.

Seline never wrote to me but once, so I only heard of her plans and prospects at second-hand. I think she was offended at the bald and unceremonious manner in which I had demanded an explanation of what she had said to Mr. Forrester. She never alluded to that matter again. Whether the mistake had been intentional

or inadvertent, I could not now discover. The thing was done. It was useless for me to go back upon its beginning. I did not even congratulate her by word of mouth upon her engagement, for her manner to me, during the single day that remained before I went to Aunt Drusilla, was so very cold and distant that I felt even a formal recognition of the step she and Mr. Forrester had taken, would be looked upon as an impertinence. We bade each other a polite farewell, and a day or two after I had arrived at Dalton, when common-sense had got the better of indignation, I wrote her a very nice little letter, to which she replied as pleasantly as could be, making no reference whatever to our quarrel, and there the matter ended.

But my sister Anne was an excellent correspondent. Her letters were like photographs, every detail given with accu-

racy, and nothing put in that was not actually there. She never gave you reflections about anything, only just told you the facts; told you them intelligently and clearly, and left you to do your own moralising, if you had any to do. So that her letters from home now, giving me a faithful reprint of what was going on there, were very interesting to me.

To make them more so, Anne looked at the new engagement from an entirely impartial point of view. She had no special enthusiasm for Mr. Forrester, though she considered him a superior man, but she candidly told me that she thought Seline was not half good enough for him. She seemed much more taken up with the prospect of being married and having an establishment of her own, than with the feeling of the duties which she would owe to her new position. Though at the same

time she was so charming, and behaved so prettily to Mr. Forrester, that he was quite content.

Anne said very little about herself. That, however, did not surprise me, because when an engagement is not spoken about openly, it naturally falls into the background, even with members of the family. We were making no preparations for it as yet. Something had been said to Mr. Berrithorne about the little house at the park-gates, where Miss Tenterden used to live, but he seemed to think it was scarcely so good as he should like; and as he did not suggest any other, we let the matter drop. I believe his own wish, and perhaps a sensible one too, was to remain in lodgings a few weeks after they were married, so that they might choose their furniture and fit up their new home together. That seemed to take away much

of the romance of the affair. I had built such castles in the air about making it all ready for them whilst they were away on their wedding journey, and putting in numbers of pretty things as surprises for them ; whereas, if the house was furnished after they were man and wife, all would be done in a prosaic, matter-of-fact sort of fashion, which, if convenient, would be very common-place too. However, it was for them to decide that, and, as I said before, Anne was silent about it. I could only feel through her letters that she was happy and content in the thought of being still near our father, and useful in the parish.

Seline's engagement was by no means kept a secret. I believe all the parish knew of it within a week. I think it was in Anne's second or third letter that she told me how impatient Mr. Forrester was

for the marriage to take place at once. Seline did not seem to object, and my father and mother had nothing to urge against it. In the next letter she said that the middle of September was talked about, which would make it just a six weeks' engagement. That certainly did look like hurrying affairs on, but there was reason in it, as Anne remarked; for, if the marriage did not take place then, it would have to be put off until after Christmas, and Mr. Forrester positively refused to wait so long. The house would be ready by the middle of September, and his wife must be ready too.

The next intelligence was that Seline had gone up to London, to stay for a week or ten days with Mrs. Macallister, who was to help her in the purchase of her trousseau. It was to be a very quiet wedding. Major Consett's recent death

made that necessary, even if my father and mother had not been averse to display on such occasions. Seline had no friends in England who needed to be invited. Mrs. Macallister, the only lady with whom she kept up any correspondence, was going abroad at the end of August, intending to move about in Switzerland for a time, and take the outward mail from Brindisi in October. Mr. Forrester, for his part, did not appear to have any people whom he wished to bring, except one gentleman as best man, so that really the wedding would be almost unfurnished with guests.

I asked, in one of my letters, what Aunt Sunshine was going to wear—we had already decided that the bridesmaids, Anne and myself, were to be in cream-coloured muslin—but, to my surprise, Anne told me that Aunt Sunshine was not coming to the wedding at all. She

refused from the very first to have anything to do with it. She said, with her customary frankness and straightforwardness, that Seline had never been a favourite of hers, and that she did not believe she would make a suitable wife for a man like Mr. Forrester. And she could not go to the expense of buying a new dress, and putting on her best smiles and her best old family lace, when she did not from her heart feel sure that they were doing the best both for themselves and for each other.

That was very like Aunt Sunshine. When I went to say good-bye to her the day after Mr. Forrester left us, of course nothing was said about the new engagement. We all knew that she was feeling a little bit ruffled about Mr. Forrester, though what it was we did not understand, and we equally knew that anything con-

nected with Seline would not meet with a lively response. So it was not until I had been a day or two at Dalton that she learned the state of the case, and then she only told my mother that the young people need not come to her for congratulations, for they would get none.

So then the wedding was to be about the middle of September, Mr. Forrester refusing to be said nay, and Seline apparently not wishing to say him so. How strange it all seemed to me as I thought it over, pacing up and down by that grey melancholy sea. More like the rapid flight of a dream than actual sober reality. And reality in which I must take a part too, for were not those two cream-coloured muslin dresses already decided upon, and had not Anne, in her last letter, asked me to say what I thought about the style in which we should have them made up?

And I told her we would leave it all to Seline, who had better taste in such matters than ourselves.

The wedding in September, the house and its furnishings in full course of preparation now, the lover making his visits to Willoughby twice or thrice a week, as my sister Anne said, or sometimes oftener, our dresses chosen, Seline's trousseau bought. No time lost over anything, not even over the sweeping away of the past.

I suppose a woman cannot judge of the motives and feelings of a man in things like these. Sometimes I would just reverse things in my own mind, put myself in Mr. Forrester's place; and it seemed to me that if he had apparently forgotten me, as he thought I had forgotten him, I would have taken a little more than a week to think about it, before I had done the same. It was turning over the leaves too quickly.

It was like shuffling through the slides of a magic-lantern in such a hurry that a comic scene leers out upon the canvas before the solemnity of a moonlit church or the pathos of a rustic funeral has had time to die out. Even in our school entertainments that sort of thing always struck me as having an element of coarseness about it, and how much more so when it came into one's own personal life. Give the funeral a minute or two, at any rate, to lapse into decent obscurity; let the church dissolve into shapeless mist, and the canvas grow white again, before your dancing harlequin and your besmeared mountebank have leave to cut their capers and turn the current of your thoughts, either in the school magic-lantern or the sadder one of human life.

But perhaps it was an instance of what people call being caught at the rebound.

And Seline, when she chose to be so, was irresistible. Then perhaps men are more easily impressed than women. Not that one supposes them to be so, in a general way. They ought to be towers of strength against which the battering ram of feminine fascination, if such a simile may be allowed, casts itself in vain. But I am forgetting. We do not have battering-rams now-a-days. Warfare is carried on by more deadly weapons, and a shot skilfully aimed by a marksman crouched behind his hedge may do more mischief than all the ponderous old machines of the days when people took their fortresses honestly and straightforwardly.

CHAPTER XX.

BUT this hurried making up of wedding preparations for Seline and Mr. Forrester was not to be all.

I had scarcely adjusted my mind to the new order of things, when my mother wrote to me to say that Mr. Berrithorne also was wishing to expedite matters. He had even suggested that the two marriages should take place at the same time, namely the end of September, a week's extra holiday having been granted to the Grammar-school in consequence of a visit which Royalty was to pay to Burstborough.

I could tell by the way in which my mother mentioned it that she was much ruffled by this proposal ; but with her usual quiet good sense she said, that if on mature consideration it appeared the best thing to be done, she should raise no objections. It was a great blow to my father, she said, not so much because it hurried Anne's departure from our home, but because it seemed to indicate a want of decision and firmness in Mr. Berrithorne's character. No sooner was a thing fixed upon than he began to see disadvantages in it, though before it was agreed upon he had been eager for it. He had at one time apparently made up his mind to take Miss Tenterden's house. Then he fell back upon the idea of lodgings for a while, and Mr. Stanislund of the Hall farm, who had a beautiful old grange and three rooms to spare, said he should be very glad to let them for a

few months to a newly-married couple. Then that was given up, and now his proposition was to be married at the same time as Mr. Forrester, and after a tour in Scotland, go back to Mrs. Dumble's apartments, which, in the meantime, were to be papered and painted, and in various ways beautified for the occasion.

Now we were not proud people, but Mrs. Dumble's cottage was not quite the place we expected the rector's daughter to go to as a bride. My father, as an alternative, proposed that they should occupy part of the rectory. Seline's departure would leave abundance of room, and we should scarcely seem to be losing Anne at all. But Mr. Berrithorne declined to agree to this. My mother said he seemed bent upon Mrs. Dumble's rooms, and so at last that matter was arranged, with the understanding that as soon as possible a suitable

house should be taken and fitted up. Mrs. Dumble was to spare them an extra parlour. The rooms were to be newly-papered and painted. Mr. Rakeridge, the owner of the property, was to add a bay window and a trellised porch, so that really for a little while it would not be much of a coming down, though different from what we had pictured as a bridal home for my sister.

I could have wished it more like the one Seline was going to. The ways of Providence did in this instance seem a little unequal. Now if anyone deserved a good home, and what in common parlance is called a prosperous marriage, that one was my sister Anne. Her whole life had been one of dignified duty, self-respect, unselfishness. She had done for love, all for love and nothing for reward, as much work as nine clergymen out of ten who make their living out of it. A single day of hers

in its fruitfulness of good, was worth all the effort, I mean effort for the welfare of others, which Seline's life had held since we knew anything about it; yet here was our brown-eyed ladybird skipping daintily to the top of the ladder, coolly informing Mr. Forrester how much gilding she should like on the panels of her drawing-room doors, how many feet of mirrors between the windows, what luxurious thickness of Persian rugs upon the floors; whilst my sister Anne would receive her wedding callers in a poultry woman's cottage, whose best parlour was scarcely high enough for Lady Matilda to stand upright in it. How would that state of things be made even, I wondered.

Of course, when this double wedding was once arranged, the engagement, which had hitherto been kept to ourselves, was allowed to transpire. I believe the parish

had a fine time of gossip. There had never been such an occurrence in Willoughby church before, and the village people seemed determined to make the most of it. As Seline said, when she little thought she would take such a prominent part in the spectacle, there were to be decorations here, decorations there, decorations everywhere; evergreen arches over the church gates, ropes and wreaths of evergreens on each side of the path to the porch, flowers under the brides' feet, flowers over their heads, ringing of bells and cheering of voices. For though, so far as we were concerned, the wedding was to be a very quiet one, the parish was not going to let its favourite daughter pass from her father's house, even to Mrs. Dumble's cottage, with no manifestation of its good-will. And Seline would come in for the benefit of what really was intended for

Anne: They might have rung the bells, but I don't think they would have done anything more if it had been only Seline.

I came home towards the middle of September, having been away six weeks. It was not a very long time, but it was long enough to have made a perceptible change in my father. Or I think I should say that this change had been gradually creeping on for much longer, only imperceptibly to me, as my own daily life ran parallel with it. Now, returning after an interval, expecting to see things just as I had left them six weeks before, I noticed a very distinct difference.

He looked years older. There was a new touch of sadness in his face, as if not life's needful labour, but its weariness and pain, had begun to write their story there. The shadow of my sister Anne's departure was already upon him. For though we

kept telling ourselves that she was not really leaving us, that we should see as much of her as ever, that her interests, her aims, her hopes, would be the same as ours, still we knew, behind it all, that there must be a very great difference. However often she came to us now, it would only be as a guest. Our life must be lived independently of hers. The best she could do, the best she could be, must henceforth belong to another than ourselves. And this, now that we had to face it, was more bitter to us than we could have thought possible.

It was a perfect September morning when I came home. There was just that crispness in the air which hints of coming frost, and braces one's energies after the long heat of summer. My father met me, and we were to walk home together across the fields. As soon as ever I caught sight

of him on the platform, I noticed a change in his step and bearing. We had always been in our simple way very proud of his upright, almost youthful carriage. How often I had walked behind him from church, and said to myself that, but for his grey hair, he might have been a younger man than his curate, such a fine elasticity was there in his tread, such quickness in his movements, strangely contrasting with the great gravity of his character. Now I knew that I should be proud of that youthful bearing no more. For as soon as we had got fairly out of the station, and I, in my gladness to be home again, was stepping out eagerly, energetically, towards the fields, he laid his hand on my shoulder and said,

‘ Gently, Marjorie. I must give that up now.’

With what a dull pain the words smote

upon me, though I would not allow, even to myself, that they meant more than temporary tiredness ; or if more than that, certainly not more than the failing vigour which must naturally come when a man is nearing his threescore years. I would not yet see that other possibilities lay before us ; that my sister's passing forth from the home was only the prelude to another departure ; and that departure, when its time came, meant the change and breaking up of all the familiar conditions of the past.

Perhaps it is better that we will not always let ourselves see. The lily flower of life would never gather up the strength to unfold itself into fair completeness, were it always remembering that its own perfection meant the decay of the leaves which gave it its first shelter. Before its full sweetness is accomplished, they must fall away, disappear into the soil out of

which they sprung, and be no more remembered, save for what they have given to that which, in its own turn, must lie down in forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XXI.

AUNT SUNSHINE presently came over to see us. Mother and I were up in the big attic, looking out the china that would be wanted for the wedding breakfast. Having come by that early train, I had already had a good long talk with Anne; also I had seen Seline's trousseau, not an extensive one, as she said it was no use buying many half-mourning costumes when she should so soon have done with it altogether; and I had seen a bit each of the two wedding dresses—the dresses themselves being in the dressmaker's hands at Burstborough

—and Seline, who was quite gracious again now, had shown me her engagement ring, an opal set between two little diamonds, and a lovely bracelet of fine Delhi gold work which Mrs. Macallister had given her as a wedding-present.

‘And also for being so attentive to her on board ship, Seline,’ I suggested.

Seline only shrugged her shoulders.

‘Poor dear old Mrs. Macallister! I did really behave very badly. But if you don’t have a little fun when you are young, when can you have it at all?’

And Seline went off to write to her betrothed, just as my mother called me to help with the china in the big attic.

I think my mother’s vigour began to show itself more now, by contrast with the great quietness which had come over my father. Her eyes, like his, had a look of seeking and not finding; her voice had an

undertone of weariness in it, sometimes ; but her step was firm as ever, her manner prompt and decided. It seemed to me as if she would be the rock which time would latest cover with its tide. She was stirring briskly about over household matters when I arrived, and I had not been home a couple of hours before I heard her step overhead, and then her voice calling me, as aforetime, to help her.

We had our talk up there together, all to ourselves amongst the china. Such heaps of it laid away in the closets, for all the Newcourt china had gone between the two sisters. Lovely old Crown Derby, bits of Chelsea, whole sets of Wedgewood stored there, some of it never having been used since my own christening. I don't think we valued it half as much as we ought to have done, for though my mother was conservative in her tastes and a thorough

housekeeper, we had never been trained to that reverence for china which a good family ought to manifest. Perhaps it was enough for me to know that we had the Crown Derby, and the Chelsea, and the Wedgewood safely stored there up in the closet, and the fact that other people knew it would not have made any difference to our self-respect. But I am sure that Lady Matilda herself, earl's daughter though she was, if that china had belonged to her, would not have rested until it had been all displayed upon maroon velvet medallions and backgrounds in the Hall drawing-room. Neither indeed, for that matter, would my Aunt Sunshine.

She came—I mean my Aunt Sunshine—just as we had got the precious treasures safely spread out upon the floor. Coming straight up to me, and giving me a hearty kiss, she only said,

‘Well!’

That was all. But I do not think any-one else could have made that word express so much. It was not congratulation at my having arrived safely home; it was not sympathy with me in the changes which were so soon to take place. It was not admiration of the Chelsea and Crown Derby, whose brilliant colouring made a glow almost as of cathedral windows in the big attic. It was not welcome; it was not kind inquiries. It gathered into itself Aunt Sunshine’s own opinion of all that she had not yet had opportunity to talk to me about. It seemed to say,

‘So here we are, and a nice winding up we have managed to make of everything. If you had asked me to help you, I would not have let all this happen, but, seeing it has happened, we will make the best of it.’

All this, and very, very much more than this, got itself manifested in the way Aunt Sunshine uttered that one word—‘Well!’

And then she put me back to a little distance, and looked at me.

‘Not so bad. Indeed, you have a better colour than when you went away. I always said the sea air suited you better than it did Anne. Anne looks very dead-alive now, but then it is with never knowing from one week to another what she is likely to be going to do. A trying man, that Mr. Berrithorne, though I have no doubt he will be a popular preacher some of these days. And you know, Marjorie, it is to be a double wedding now, and you to be bridesmaid to both of them.’

I told auntie I already knew as much as that.

‘A very good arrangement, as I tell your mother, making one trouble of it;

and Anne's bridesmaid's dress will come in well enough for evenings, with a little alteration in the trimming. Only I do feel vexed that there should be triumphal arches, and all that sort of thing, for Seline, just as if she had been one of the family. You will see she will bow and smile and appropriate them all to herself, whilst Anne walks along as meekly. Well, it is a world of change, that is all.'

'No, not all, auntie,' I said, 'for you will be obliged to go to the wedding now. You will never let Anne be married, and you not there to see her.'

Auntie kissed me again, and then made-believe to be stooping down to admire a beautiful blue and gold sugar-basin. But I am perfectly sure she was crying, and did not want me to see. She took out her handkerchief, and wiped the delicate tracery work of leaf and tendril, and be-

fore she put it away, wiped her own eyes, in a furtive, accidental sort of manner.

‘Well, yes, child, I wouldn’t do anything that was not kind by my own relations. Which of them is to be married first?’

‘Anne, of course,’ replied my mother, ‘being the rector’s daughter.’

‘All right. Then, when that wedding is over, I shall turn a little faint, and go and sit in the vestry. You must all of you understand it, and not make any inquiries. I don’t feel as if I could see Seline married with any sort of satisfaction.’

‘Poor Seline!’ said my mother.

I think we all felt that, though she was making what might be called a very successful marriage, there was still much left to be sorry for in many ways.

‘Poor Seline! indeed!’ and auntie very nearly broke a cup and saucer by suddenly

striking her foot against it. 'Why, in one way, yes, she *is* poor, for if she were fifty times better, she would be no wife for a man like Mr. Forrester.'

'Indeed! you rate him highly,' my mother replied.

'I don't know that. It may only be that I rate her so low down. Compared with him, I call her a cipher, and you may multiply a cipher by whatever you like, it is a cipher still.'

I felt it necessary to stand up for Seline, if only for the sake of argument, so I said,

'Yet, auntie, you once told me that whatever Seline did, she would make a success of it. Don't you remember?'

'Yes. But I didn't think she would have done this—at least, I mean I didn't think Mr. Forrester would have done it. The way men are befooled by a taking face and a neat way of wearing flowers is

to me something astonishing. A little selfish flirt, to come spinning over here and amusing herself, first with one and then with another, and then, when it becomes necessary to have some one to get a living for her, to go and——’

‘Never mind,’ said my mother; ‘Seline is to be Mr. Forrester’s wife.’

My mother said that in a way which ended the subject. She had never from the first allowed us to criticise Seline beyond a certain point. It was enough for her that the girl had come to us friendless, that it was our clear duty to make a home for her. And, once having satisfied herself that the faults in Seline’s character were not such as we were likely to follow, she discouraged any animadversion upon them.

We then began to talk about the arrangements for the wedding, and auntie

soon went away, went the more readily as Mr. Forrester was coming to spend the afternoon at the rectory.

I will not recall the week or two of confusion and unrest which preceded the wedding. Mr. Berrithorne was of course constantly appearing and disappearing. Two or three times a week Mr. Forrester turned up, and he and Seline used to spend their time in the summer-house, the rest of us being very careful not to disturb them, for at best there was little enough time for them to find out each other's characters before the final step had to be taken.

It seemed to me, when I shook hands with him again, that it was years and not barely six weeks since we had said good-bye in the church under St. Christopher's window; and that waters deeper than any

through which that old saint was wearying, lay between us now. Still, far away though it might be, there was a line where heaven and earth met. We had once, for a little while, belonged to each other. He had found in me what might have put its crown of completeness on his life. I had found in him what had given me the key to myself. No chance or change could now deprive me of that possession. I had had my struggle, and I had won my rest. Time might come and time might go, but the future could bring me again no sorrow like that which I had conquered in the past. The voice had said to me, as it says to every human soul sooner or later, 'Go; sell all that thou hast.' I had done so; truly a costly selling; but once done, it was done for ever. And the peace which follows it was steadfastly mine.

So they were married, my sister Anne to Mr. Berrithorne, and Seline Consett to Michael Forrester. And we three who were left, settled down to our quiet life.

But what a different life it was to us now!

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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